

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1895.

WHEN LEAVES WERE GREEN

By SYDNEY HODGES.

CHAPTER LVI.

SIB HEARS THE NEWS.

"I KNOW I am keeping you here, Blanche. If it were not for me you would be with Kate and her brother," said Sib Maitland a few days after her arrival at Lupton.

"No, Sib, I should not. They think it is better for me not to be there at present."

Blanche's head drooped a little as she said this. She seemed to read Glyn's motive, but there was still a mystery about it which she could not understand. They had not told her of the blindness.

"Besides, Sib, even if they wished me to come, I could not leave you."

"That brings me to what I want to ask, Blanche. I want you to tell me the truth, dear. I know I am very ill, but at home they would not let me know all the doctor said. I know there is something kept from me. Tell me the truth, Blanche."

"Of course you are very seriously ill, darling. It would be useless to deny that. But there is no danger. I mean no immediate danger."

"But the danger may come at any moment—this is what you mean, Blanche, is it not?"

Blanche did not answer. Her heart was too full.

"You need not fear to tell me, Blanche. If I knew I was to die to-morrow I should not mind, if you will do what I ask you."

"What is that, Sib."

"Come nearer to me. I cannot tell you while you sit there."

Blanche came over to the couch upon which her cousin was lying. The girl had turned her face to the window and was looking out

through the pane to the cold November day. A recent gale had stripped the trees of their verdure, and the branches stood up weird and naked in the chill air. Here and there an oak retained a few specks of gold, and the deep bracken had turned to amber amid the brown boles. Everything denoted that saddest of all times, the dying of the year.

Sib took her cousin's hand in her own and went on.

"I want you to promise me one thing, Blanche. When it is quite sure that I am dying—that I have not many hours to live—you must promise me that you will send for George. Will you promise?"

A terrible sensation filled Blanche's heart. She had not told Sib of D'Eyncourt's fearful end. It was agreed on all hands that it was better to keep it from her. What need was there to embitter her last days—possibly to shorten them—by the recital of a tragedy with which she was so intimately associated? But now, what was her cousin to say? what excuse to make? It seemed brutal to refuse such a request to a dying girl.

"I fancy he is abroad, Sib. I do not know where to write to him. You know, too, how badly he has behaved, not only to you but to others."

"Blanche, Blanche. Do not say a word against him. What is the use? No one is without faults. I do not want to recall them, or even to think about them. If he came and knew, as of course he must, that I was dying, he would be to me as he was in those dear days when I first knew him. I want him—if only for ten minutes—to bring back those days. It is impossible to tell the happiness I felt then. I want to feel it once more—to shut out all the dreadful time that has intervened and to let that time come back. Oh, Blanche, you do not know the intensity of the longing I feel to see him once more as he was at that time. To watch his eyes as they looked into mine, to feel his arms about me, holding me, oh! so closely to his heart. Blanche, you cannot refuse this when I am dying."

She sank her head upon her cousin's shoulder. What was Blanche to do? It seemed a sin to deceive a love like this, and yet she felt that the knowledge of the truth would kill her outright. No. At all hazards it must be kept from her. Sib went on.

"It was such a lovely time too. I never remember anything like that weather. The sky was without a cloud all day long and day after day. The flowers were so exquisite. The roses in the garden and the wild flowers in the woods. He used to gather me big bunches of honeysuckle—how delicious the perfume was. Life was like heaven to me then, and I looked forward to so many years of a happy future with him. How strange it all seems now!"

A tear trickled and fell on Blanche's hand. She could scarcely keep back her own, but she had to act the part of a comforter. She wound her arms closely about the poor, frail form beside her.

"I do not know why it is, Sib, but life to most of us is one long

series of disappointment. It seems so strange in a world which is so wondrously fair. We do not know why it is, but it is the lot of all. Sib, I am not at all sure that many of us, if they had the choice, would not gladly change places with you. Even if we gain our heart's dearest desires they often prove a source of new troubles and disappointments. There seems to be no abiding-place here. Let us hope we shall reach one by-and-by. Whatever happens, darling, you may be thankful if you are spared from the years of sorrow we most of us get in this storm-tossed world."

"And yet there are such exquisite moments—moments of such indescribable happiness."

"But how few and far between. One might count such moments on one's fingers, Sib."

"That is the bitter part of it. But, Blanche, you will try and find him, will you not? There may not be much time to lose, darling. Sometimes now I think I have not many days to live—perhaps not many hours. There is another thing too I wish to say. If his life has been so wicked as you tell me it has—although I do not like to think so—it might do him good to see me. People will listen to one who is near death, and my dying words might influence all his future life. He may never even have thought of the loving mercy of Christ. I did not in those days. We are apt to forget Him when we are so very, very happy. Perhaps this is why we are so seldom allowed to be so. You must let him come, Blanche. You *will* try and find him at once?"

Absolute despair was at Blanche's heart. What could she do. She felt she must temporise, even in this trying moment.

"I will do my best, Sib," she answered.

"And at once."

"Yes, at once."

Sib gave a great sigh of relief. "Oh, Blanche, you have made me so happy," she said. "To see him again! To see him again! Oh, thank God, thank God!"

She threw herself back on the couch with upturned eyes. Her fair, delicate face seemed transfigured. It was as if a gleam of the glory to come had stolen through the November clouds and lighted on her brow.

Blanche could bear it no longer. She made a hurried excuse and hastened to her own room. All her own pent-up anxieties and sorrows had been stirred to their inmost depths by poor Sib's words; the long suppression had been too much, and tears came to relieve the overburthened heart.

The next fortnight was a terrible trial to Blanche. Although Sib did not recur to the subject her cousin saw by her wistful eyes and the anxious, inquiring look that it was seldom out of her mind. She saw, too, that Sib felt her time was drawing near. At length the poor girl spoke again.

"Blanche, have you made any inquiries?" she asked.

"No, darling. I did not think there was any necessity yet."

"I think there is, Blanche. Pray do not delay. At least try and discover where he is. Promise me this."

It was as much as Blanche could do to keep her countenance from betraying the fatal truth. To her whose whole life had been so truthful, this evasion was terrible, and yet she knew if she told the truth it would be giving Sib her death-blow. She had taken counsel of Kate, who, in a long letter, strongly urged her not to reveal the terrible tragedy which had taken place; and to have merely mentioned the fact of D'Eyncourt's death would have involved her in a series of falsehoods, for Sib would have insisted on knowing all particulars. She felt, however, that it could not go on. That poor, worn face, for ever before her, seemed a silent reproach which she could no longer bear to encounter. She resolved to take the vicar into her confidence and be guided by his advice.

"Sib, I am going to leave you for an hour or two. I want to go to the village. Hooper will stay with you, and read to you if you wish. It is such a lovely morning that I think I shall walk."

It was indeed wonderful weather for the time of year. The day was one of those that come sometimes in the early winter, but only at rare intervals. The air was so sunny and bright and warm, that it seemed like the sweet face of summer turning to look back once more through the gloom of the winter days. Even the leafless branches cast off their dull leaden tint, and, under the scintillating sunshine, assumed a purple hue, which faded away into the soft haze of the distance in harmonious contrast to the few remaining specks of autumn gold.

"It is so lovely in the conservatory, Sib, that I think I shall leave you there. The camellias are really splendid, and there are some new ferns which will gladden your heart. I will get Hooper to arrange a comfortable couch for you."

"Thanks. I should like it so much. How good you are to me, Blanche."

In half-an-hour all was arranged. Sib was made quite comfortable on her couch surrounded by those exquisite blooms which the floriculturist snatches from the rude hands of winter, and cherishes for our perpetual delight. The sunlight came glinting down through the delicate creepers which hung from the transparent roof above; a soft air stole in through the partly opened glasses, and the delicate perfume of exotics pervaded the warm atmosphere. Blanche had started for the village, and Hooper, her maid, had bought some books with which she was to amuse the sick girl during her cousin's absence.

"It is very good of you, Hooper, but I don't think I can listen to reading this morning. This is all so lovely that I should like to lie here and look about me a bit. You need not stay. Come back in half-an-hour and see if I want anything."

"Very well, miss. Are you sure you are quite warm enough. Shall I get you another shawl?"

"Oh, no. It is like summer here. I shall enjoy it so much. You may just lift this pillow a little bit. Ah, so—that is delightful."

"You are sure you don't want anything more, miss?"

"Quite sure, thank you."

She lay there very still, the only drooping flower amid all the lovely blooms around. All was so sunny and calm, that, by-and-by a pleasant drowsiness stole over her and she closed her eyes. Sib's nights were sorely troubled now. The racking cough, which worries the consumptive patient to the last, kept her awake for hours, so that when Hooper returned at the appointed time, and found her, as she thought, sleeping, she rejoiced greatly, and stole away again on tip-toe.

But Sib was not asleep. Her thoughts had gone back to that time which was never absent from her mind. To the days of early love, to the summer woods and the moonlit terrace, and the thousand vivid remembrances of the time when life had been like a foretaste of heaven. It all came back to her with wonderful vividness to-day. The faint perfume around her, and the warm air were possibly suggestive of those summer days. Where was D'Eyncourt now, she wondered? Had he entirely forgotten her, or was there still a lingering trace of the love which he had professed in tones which went to her very heart? Doubtless he had gone through many trials. If life had been all smooth to him he might have been true to her. She fancied he would have been, for she could not even now bring herself to believe in such wilful wickedness as the reverse involved. It was little matter now, however. There was no power on earth, she knew, that could snatch her from the fatal grasp that death had laid upon her. But she must see him before she died. Blanche had promised this, and this was her only hope or desire in life now.

By-and-by she passed from waking remembrances to the memories that come back to us in sleep. Her head sank back upon the pillow, her hand dropped by her side, she glided into what seemed complete oblivion. Oblivion! No. With that strange incongruity which must always remain a mystery to psychologists, remembrance became more vivid when slumber fell upon the brain. She not only remembered, she lived and moved in that delightful time of early love. D'Eyncourt was by her side—she felt the warm pressure of his hand—she heard his fervent words. She absolutely saw the fatal beauty of his face. He wound his arms about her, and again a delirious joy stole into her heart as his lips met hers. The feeling was too intense. With a low cry of exquisite happiness, she awoke.

Real voices were coming in through the half-opened glasses of the conservatory. Voices of two gardeners who had paused in their work, and who were utterly oblivious of the proximity of anyone who could overhear them. The air was so still that every word fell upon Sib's ear with peculiar distinctness.

"I'll never believe Capt D'Eyncourt did it. He's a wild one, I know—a regular dare-devil—but he wouldn't commit a murder in cold blood. He's too much of a gentleman."

"But look at the facts, Tom. Look at the facts."

"Facts be blowed! Anybody else might have knocked young Mr. Beverley on the head besides the Captain. I don't believe he did it."

"That's all very well, but go into it bit by bit. What can you say then? Here, now. It's known that Mr. Beverley was with the Captain in the afternoon. Nobody knows what passed between 'em, but he was there. Well, he goes away to walk to the station just afore the storm began. Two minutes after the Captain comes out and tells the groom to saddle the fastest mare in the stable. Then away he goes, as he says, to Brighton. Well, half-an-hour after Mr. Beverley is picked up with a cracked skull in the road leading to the station, and not far off in a field are found the marks of a horse's hoofs which correspond exactly with the feet of the mare the Captain rode. Then, next day, what do they find at the bottom of a chalk pit quite away from the Brighton road, but the dead body of the Captain, and his horse dead beside him; and in the breast pocket of his coat is a weapon covered with blood which—— What's that?"

A long, low, terrible moan which seemed to come from a breaking heart. The man stopped horror-stricken. Then he looked at his companion, then stole noiselessly towards the conservatory. Through the thick leaves and the camellia blooms he saw the drapery of a woman stretched supine upon a couch.

He could not see the face. If he had looked upon it he would have looked upon the face of death.

His words—his fatal words—had snapped the feeble cord, and Sib's soul had gone upward—

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

Will the whiteness of her soul be deemed a sufficient atonement for the blackness of his whom she loved so well, when the two shall stand face to face upon the Awful Threshold?

CHAPTER LVII.

GLYN'S RESOLVE.

FORBES was almost established at Firwolds now. As Glyn gained strength, which he did rapidly, his friend became more and more useful in a thousand ways. He had taken up his abode at an hotel near the station, so that he was always near at hand, and generally spent the whole day at Firwolds.

There was no difficulty now about the property. D'Eyncourt's

death had removed every obstacle. Mr. Norwood was hard at work not only in getting this settled, but in establishing the illegality of Glyn's unlucky marriage.

Forbes usually arrived early and found Kate in the breakfast-room. On one occasion she was not there. He inquired of the servant where she was.

"Miss Beverley has had some very bad news this morning, sir; she told me to let her know when you arrived."

Forbes vainly endeavoured to conjecture what this new calamity could be. He was not kept long waiting. Kate came down as soon as she heard of his arrival; her eyes wet with tears.

"Oh, Mr. Forbes! There is such terrible news. Poor Sib is dead."

"Dead?" echoed Forbes.

"Yes; and so suddenly. Blanche is overwhelmed with grief. She left her for a few hours while she went to the village. On her way back she met Hooper with the carriage. She was hastening down to tell her poor Sib was gone."

"How very dreadful."

"It is too terrible," said Kate, her tears breaking out afresh. "I am in such a difficulty too," she went on. "I must go to Blanche and I do not like leaving Glyn. What is to be done?"

"Pray, don't take it so to heart, Miss Beverley," said Forbes. "Let me stay with Glyn. He does not actually need you now, and I shall be so very glad to help you in the difficulty, don't you know."

"How good you are. I don't know what I should have done all this dreadful time without your help."

Kate was sitting on a couch near the window, her eyes still wet with tears. Forbes suddenly seated himself by her side and placed his hand on hers.

"Look here, Kate," he said, calling her for the first time by her Christian name, "I don't know whether I am going to make an awful fool of myself, and I fear this is hardly the time to speak, but I must take the chance. I love you better than anything in the world, and I want you to be my wife. Then I shall have the right to help you in every way, don't you know?"

Kate trembled all over, and her cheeks turned to the colour of roses, but she did not take away the hand which Forbes now held in a close clasp.

"Oh, Mr. Forbes; I am not worthy of you," she said.

It was not affectation, for she looked upon Forbes as the best man in the world, and she loved him with her whole heart and soul.

"Don't say that, Kate. I know that it is very much the other way. I am a heavy, stupid sort of fellow; not fit to hold a candle to your brother; but you will never find one who loves you more truly. Will you take me as I am? Only say yes, and I shall be the happiest fellow in the world."

Kate took him at his word. Looking up to him with still streaming eyes she answered simply "Yes," and then—

But there is no need to particularise what followed. We know the usual result of a compact like this; when the compact springs from the impulse of two loving hearts.

"So now," said Forbes, "you can go without any compunctions with regard to your brother. He will be my brother as well in future. You may depend I shall take good care of him while you are away."

"I shall feel perfectly happy about him."

"But, I say, Kate, I can't wait long without seeing you again. If you are not back in a few days, I must run over and see you at Lupton."

"I shall so long for the time to come," said ingenuous Kate. "I have learned to rely on you so much that I don't know how I could face the future without you. But we must wait until these few sad days are over. Poor darling Sib; what a troubled life she has had."

Glyn received the news of what had passed between Kate and Forbes with great rejoicing. He felt quite contented with the arrangement which left him in the charge of the latter. Indeed, he was most anxious that his sister should be with Blanche now that this new sorrow had descended on her. There seemed to be no end to the complications of grief. He was getting more and more confirmed in the belief that it was useless to look for anything but a succession of troubles in this life.

And indeed it was no wonder in his case. The remembrance of all he had gone through, the thought that his eyes were darkened, perhaps for ever, to the light and beauty of the world, that his blindness, whatever might happen, was an effectual barrier between himself and the woman he loved; all this pressed upon him until he became absolutely morbid. The darkest thoughts filled his mind when he dwelt on his future.

"It would have been better if the lightning had finished me altogether, Forbes," he said one day after Kate had taken her departure for Lupton. "Think what a wretched existence I shall have to drag out for the remainder of my days. Think of having to live, perhaps fifty years, in darkness, without love and without hope."

"Not without love, old fellow; you have your sister. There cannot be a more loving heart than hers."

Forbes purposely avoided any reference to Blanche; he knew that in Glyn's present state of mind it was delicate ground.

"But you will take her from me," said Glyn. "I don't complain, God knows. It will be a happy future for her, poor girl; still, it must make my life more lonely."

"I will do nothing of the kind. You cannot suppose I should be such an awful brute as to take her from you. No, we will live together, and you will have two nurses instead of one, don't you know?"

"That's all very well. I know your intentions are good, but it would be an impossibility. She would have all sorts of things to attend to. She would wish to devote her whole time and thoughts to you and your comforts. It is but natural. I could not expect her to go on attending to my whims and fancies after she is married."

"You take a morbid view of the case, Glyn. It would be our greatest pleasure to attend to your wants and comforts."

"You think so now, and it is very good of you, but I could not be a burthen on anyone. No, no. When you are married I must do the best I can for myself. Nobody but a wife could attend to a poor broken-down wretch in such a condition as mine, and I could not now ask any woman to marry me."

With a sudden impulse Forbes ventured on what he knew was forbidden ground.

"I know a woman who would marry you," he said. "The best woman in all this world bar one."

Glyn uttered an angry exclamation. "I have said over and over again I would not have that referred to. It is absolute torture to me. Good heavens, do you think I could ask her to share a lot like mine? She so full of youth, and health, and beauty, surrounded by wealth and luxury to become the constant nurse of a poor blind creature like myself! Besides, you know what I feel about that other woman. I have lived with her as her husband. However illegal the marriage may have been, it has left a taint on me. I could never ask Blanche to be my wife, at least, not while that woman lives."

"This is quixotic," said Forbes.

"It is not. It is but justice to a pure woman. Even supposing for the sake of argument that she could bring herself to accept me as I am, think what my feeling would be? I should be haunted perpetually by the thought of the fate to which I had doomed her. You must remember what the future may be. When the recollection of all this recent sorrow has passed, as it is but natural it will, she will take her place in the world. You must remember that her social station is a high one. Her gentle heart and simple tastes have led her to relinquish it to some extent. It is one of my bitterest thoughts that possibly I may have been the cause. She will return to that station in time. She will be courted and admired wherever she goes. She might marry among the highest in the land. Can I drag her down from such a prospect as this? But yet the reverse is too terrible, and I have loved her so dearly."

He broke down altogether. Forbes went over and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Come, come, old man, this will never do; you will think differently about these things when you are better."

"Ah, that is just the one thing I dread. The thought that I may give way. I have pondered over this matter for hours and hours,

Forbes. I am wondering whether you will help me in something I want to do!"

"What is it?"

"Simply, as soon as I am strong enough, to go away from this abroad somewhere—to the South of France or Italy. Of course I can't do so alone, and I can't take Kate away from her friend at present."

"But why should you do this? There is not the least necessity for it."

"There is the strongest necessity for it. As long as I am here her sympathies will be constantly on the alert. Sooner or later I believe she would come to me. This is what I want to avoid, for it must not be. Do you hear? It *must* not. If I am away, if there is no possibility of our being thrown together, she would in time turn to other thoughts and pursuits. It is only natural that she should. She might even forget me altogether. It is the only chance for me too. Here, I am perpetually on the rack—not only with intense longing to see her, but from the fear that she may come. If I could carry out the plan I propose, it would be best for both of us in the end. In any case it is but justice to her, and would give her the chance of a brighter future than she could ever have with me—God help me."

Forbes could not but admit that there was much truth in what Glyn said. He admired the single-heartedness which prompted his poor friend to accept banishment rather than permit a sacrifice on the part of the woman he loved. He did not however see his way.

"Kate would never consent to you going alone, Glyn," he said.

"She would if you were with me. I do not ask you to stay. Only see me safely settled. I can afford to pay for careful nursing now. I can obtain all the attention I want with money. It is not a pleasant alternative, but I should feel more independent. Gold must take the place of love in future."

He gave a bitter laugh which was inexpressibly painful to Forbes. It seemed to indicate so completely the wreck of the genial temperament he had known so recently.

"If I go with you I go to stay," he answered. "There will be no half measures with me."

"That I cannot consent to," said Glyn. "I might have done so a week ago, but now things are altered. There is Kate to be considered. No; you shall take me there and leave me there, and the sooner it is done the better."

"But you are not fit to travel yet."

"I shall be in a week or two. Between ourselves I have spoken to the doctor about it. He says in my shattered state, a winter in the South of France would be the very best thing for me."

Forbes was sorely puzzled. He felt there was sense in what Glyn proposed. At any rate the separation would be a test of affection under these most distressing circumstances. He could not, however,

make up his mind to consent at once. Besides, there was another to be consulted now in all things which pertained to himself. He therefore begged Glyn to give him a few days to think over his proposition.

Then, as soon as the funeral of poor Sib was over, he wrote a long letter to Kate telling her all that had passed.

And Kate read the letter to Blanche as they sat together the following morning. To her surprise Blanche did not say a word for several minutes, but a look of quiet resolution was in her face. At length Kate asked her what she thought.

"I think it will be better to let him have his own way. I see all that is in his thoughts, and it only makes me love him the more. Perhaps by-and-by, when he has had time to think over these things, he may come to a different conclusion; especially if he finds that I can never change."

And then a tear trickled down Blanche's cheek, and Kate came over to her and put her arms about her, and the two girls wept in unison, and felt they were bound together by stronger ties than ever.

CHAPTER LVIII.

FORBES GROWS ANXIOUS.

EIGHT months had passed away. The time of primroses had come again. They were bright over all the woods of Lupton, which were a perfect paradise of early flowers.

Kate Beverley was sitting at a small writing-table in the recess of a window in the morning-room. A pen was in her hand, but she was not writing. Her thoughts were far away, her eyes wandering over the beauty of garden, park, and hilly distance; her ears taking in, unconsciously, the mellow murmur of the bees, the twittering of the birds, and the far-off echo of the cuckoo "telling his name to all the hills" from the wood below.

She had paused in the midst of a letter to Forbes—about the fiftieth she had written in the last eight months—for her lover would not rest without one or two a week. She was growing restless and unhappy at this prolonged wandering of the two friends; for Glyn would not return and Forbes would not leave him. Indeed, he knew that in spite of the pain of separation, he was pleasing Kate by remaining.

Glyn's condition caused him the greatest anxiety. Whether it was from the injuries he had received or from the mental torture he had undergone, Forbes could not tell, but he was falling deeper and deeper into a state of morbid gloom from which no efforts of his friend could arouse him. It was a time of real trial to Forbes, a trial that was aggravated by his having no one to share his troubles. Out of consideration to Kate he had to a great extent concealed Glyn's depression from her. He went on hoping from day to day that a

change for the better might come, and he therefore wrote as cheerfully as he possibly could respecting her brother.

Glyn took the strangest fancies. Blind as he was he insisted on travelling to Rome and Naples. It was the saddest sight possible to see him in the midst of the wonders of the Eternal City or on the shores of the exquisite Bay of Naples insisting on the minutest description of every object or scene that was before them.

"Place me now facing Vesuvius," he would say, when they were on the sea-shore at Naples. "I feel the soft air from off the sea. I hear the lapping of the waves, the prattle of the children's voices. Tell me the colour of the sea, the shape of the boats, the tint of the distant mountains, and I shall see it all in my mind's eye." Or at Rome in the sculpture-galleries he would make Forbes lead him from one masterly group to another and touch them with his hand, and gaze towards them with his sightless orbs until his constant friend was quite overcome by the earnest longing in the sad face, and felt that he would have almost sacrificed his own sight to have given Glyn a glimpse of those wonders to see which had been the one great longing of his life. But this could not go on, for reaction followed the temporary excitement which Glyn felt at being actually amid these wondrous scenes. After a time their presence only increased the depression caused by his terrible deprivation.

"What am I to do?" he would cry. "Where go? How can I find relief? Why are health and strength again given to me if beauty and sunshine are for ever shut out? Even my wealth comes as a mockery now. If I had but died that night when the lightning struck me, how much better it would have been!"

This was the sort of thing Forbes had to listen to day after day. He would have endured it if only to satisfy the promptings of his kind heart, but when he felt besides that it was for the sake of Kate's brother he bore it all cheerfully, and always had a word of encouragement and hope. But Kate did not know all this, she was to learn it afterwards from Glyn's own lips. She knew that her brother was restless and unhappy, and insisted on moving from place to place. She felt that this was quite a sufficient trial to so warm a heart as her lover's, and she was on this particular morning pausing to think how best she could repay him for all his loving self-sacrifice.

Suddenly, in the midst of her musings she heard a step in the hall, the door of the room opened; she turned, and the next moment Forbes himself was in the room.

She started up and ran forward with a little cry. Then her lover's strong arms were folded about her, holding her in a close embrace.

"My darling! do I really see you once more after all this time?" he said.

She could scarcely speak for happiness, scarcely keep down the sobs that came from intensity of joy.

"I was just writing to you," she said. "Oh, how little I thought

you were so near. How good you have been. What can I ever do to repay you?"

"We will talk of that by-and-by, darling. I daresay you will find a way."

"But what of Glyn! Is he back too?"

"Yes. We both returned only yesterday—quite suddenly."

"But what has brought you back? You said in your last you could not persuade him to come."

"I think the immediate cause was a letter. He won't confess it, but when I suggested coming, as I had done a thousand times before, he offered no opposition."

"What letter?"

"I have brought it to show you. But you are trembling still, darling. Sit here and I will read it to you. By the way, where is your friend Blanche? she ought to hear it too."

"I think she is gone to the village. She is very busy about her schools and various matters. Very good in every way, you may be sure."

"Is she still silent on the subject of Glyn as you told me she was in your letters?"

"Yes, she seldom refers to him. I think she felt his going more deeply than ever I imagined. I can understand and respect her silence. It is a very, very difficult position. Even now I cannot say that Glyn was wholly wrong. Good as she is, it would have been a terrible fate to be bound for life to a blind man. But about this letter?"

"It is here—stay, you had better read it yourself."

Forbes placed the letter in Kate's hand and watched her face as she read. It was as follows:—

"Philadelphia. May 16th, 187-.

"MY DEAR GLYN,—I think it may be a relief to you to hear that I am going to be married again, very shortly. I have met with a gentleman, Count D'Epigny, who seems in every way suited to me, and who I am sure will make me happy. He is very amiable and accomplished but with narrow means, but of course this last does not matter, as I have plenty for both. I thought it right to give you the earliest information, as you need have no further anxiety about me. We shall remain here for some time as the Count is engaged in some engineering works. When they are completed, we shall probably reside in Italy or somewhere on the continent. I like America pretty well. The people are, on the whole, very nice—the men very attentive. I have had very little news from England. I trust you are well and happy. I should like to hear of you sometimes.

"I read the announcement of *his* death in the papers, but have had no particulars. You may imagine what I felt. With best love,

"Ever yours affectionately, "LAURA."

Kate put down the letter in silent astonishment.

"What do you think of it?" asked Forbes.

"I think she is the most amazing woman I ever heard of," said Kate.

"She has the knack of taking life easily, anyway," said Forbes.

"Of course Glyn will have nothing more to do with her," Kate went on. "What did he say when he heard the letter?"

"He only laughed. It was rather a bitter laugh I must admit, but I am glad he took it in that way."

"After all I forgive her for this. It is about the best thing that could happen for poor dear Glyn. But what a wretched thing for the poor man."

"If he is not an adventurer—which I think highly probable," said Forbes.

"It will serve her right if he is. But do not let us talk about it. I feel furious with indignation when I think of that woman, and I am too happy this morning to feel furious with anyone. Tell me about Glyn. Is there any improvement in him yet?"

Forbes hesitated a moment before he answered; then he said:

"Kate, darling, I fear I must prepare you for very bad news about him. I have not told you all in my letters. It was useless distressing you, as you could do no good."

"Oh, what is it?" Kate cried, looking at him with eager eyes. "Is he seriously ill?"

"It is not his bodily ailments to which I refer, Kate. It is his mind. He suffers from such intense fits of depression, that at times I am seriously alarmed. I sometimes feel afraid he may lose his reason."

"Oh no, no!" cried Kate, "this is too dreadful. I must go to him at once."

"My darling I do not see that your going would do him any good—at least, only temporarily. He sits for hours without speaking. No efforts of mine will rouse him. And unfortunately the fits are becoming worse."

"What can be done? Poor darling Glyn! Oh, how much he has suffered."

"There is only one thing that would do him good—one person I should say—that is Blanche. And he would never consent to see her, I fear. Indeed we do not now know what her feelings may be."

"I think I can answer for her. I believe she loves him more dearly than ever, although she says nothing."

"Shall we tell her?"

"I think so. She has such good sense that she may suggest something. At any rate we must tell her. It would be unfair to keep it from her."

Presently Blanche returned, and after she had somewhat recovered from the surprise and evident emotion caused by Forbes' sudden appearance, they told her of Glyn's condition, and showed her the letter from Laura.

She turned very pale, but for a few minutes she did not speak. Presently she said :

“ Of course you will go to him at once, Kate.”

“ Yes, that is my intention,” Kate answered.

“ You must let me go with you, but you must promise not to reveal my presence in the house, until I see a favourable opportunity of making it known. Will you consent to this ? ”

“ We shall be only too glad to leave everything to you,” said Forbes. “ I can assure you of one thing, Miss Venables. If your presence does not rouse him I dread to think of the future. It is impossible to say what this morbid gloom may end in.”

CHAPTER LIX.

ON THE TERRACE.

ON the way to Firwolds, Forbes gave a more detailed account of his wanderings with Glyn abroad. Blanche listened with intense eagerness, but said very little. As for poor Kate, her tears flowed afresh as every new incident was narrated.

The anxious time he had gone through had quite altered Forbes. It was the first break in the smooth monotony of his life. There were actual lines of care in his face, formerly so round and rubicund. Kate had noticed this at the first glance, and she felt that to a great extent it was for her that her lover had voluntarily endured this time of trial. As they neared Firwolds Blanche spoke on the subject again.

“ I have another request to make,” she said. “ If he should inquire about me, I want you to lead him to suppose that I am fairly well and happy. He may ask what I said about him. You can say, and say truly, that I have said very little. I have a strong motive for making this request, and I know you will grant it.”

They both seemed to read her thoughts and of course consented.

“ You will give me every facility also for watching him without his knowing I am there. It will not last for long. In a day, or at the most two I shall have made up my mind whether or not to make my presence known.”

There was a strange calmness about Blanche as she gave these directions. Although to some extent they saw her motive, it was next to impossible to detect the real feelings of her heart. Kate had even doubted once or twice whether she really did care for Glyn as much as she used to do.

“ I had forgotten to tell you that we saw the doctor again as we came through London,” said Forbes. “ He made another careful examination of the eyes. He thinks after all that the blindness was due to the lightning, as Glyn said.”

"Did he give any hope?"

"Yes. He said he thought he detected some improvement. The worst feature was the length of time he had remained blind. Of course, as he said, these cases are very rare, but people who are struck blind by lightning usually recover their sight much sooner. Unfortunately this dreadful depression tends to retard his recovery. It seems that the lightning paralyses the optic nerve. Anything therefore that depresses the nervous system diminishes the chances of recovery."

"Therefore health and cheerfulness would facilitate his recovery," said Blanche quickly.

"Exactly. If this terrible depression could be shaken off his chances of recovery could be infinitely greater."

"Did the doctor tell him this?" asked Kate.

"Yes, but it had little effect. It is useless hiding the truth, but really I think he has sunk into such a morbid state that he does not care to recover. You will see for yourselves."

On reaching Firwolds, Forbes went at once to find Glyn and to prepare him for Kate's arrival. He was in none of the lower rooms. On inquiring of the servant, the man informed him that Mr. Beverley was walking on the terrace in front of the house.

"This is what he has done in almost every place we have visited," Forbes said. "He has some space measured out near a wall or balustrade; then he paces it himself, and afterwards walks up and down for hours, I believe, without counting; he knows exactly when he is at the end of so many paces. He then turns and walks back again occasionally feeling the wall, or whatever it may be, with his stick. I let him have his way, for he hates to be dependent even on my arm."

They proceeded to the drawing-room, the low windows of which opened to the terrace. Blanche still preserved the strange calmness which she had maintained all the morning, but Kate was so overcome at the thought of again meeting her brother under such painful conditions that she could hardly stand. They went to one of the windows and stood there while Forbes passed out on to the terrace and advanced towards Glyn.

At the sound of his footstep on the gravel Glyn stopped and turned.

In spite of her forced calmness Blanche could hardly suppress a cry.

She had not seen Glyn since the day they had visited Sutton-Colville together. He had passed through the valley of the Shadow of Death since that time. The face was so wan and worn, so full of the traces of acute suffering—both mental and bodily—that she would hardly have recognised him. His form, too, had shrunk to half its former dimensions and, saddest sight of all, the eyes which once looked into her own, full of the light of love, were now dark and meaningless,

and though turned towards her, were utterly unconscious of her presence.

She sank into a chair in the recess of the window. All the colour had died out of her face. She sat with clasped hands the very picture of despair.

"Oh, Kate, Kate, this is too dreadful," she whispered. "What tortures he must have endured to reduce him to that."

"Hush, darling. Do not let him hear you," said Kate, who was herself trembling in every limb. "I am so anxious to see what he will do."

With a great effort Blanche controlled her emotion and stood beside Kate, watching.

When Forbes was within two or three yards of him Glyn spoke.

"Is that you, Forbes?"

"Yes. I have got back all right."

"Is Kate come?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

Forbes made a sign for her to advance. She came forward quickly. Glyn's face betrayed but little emotion.

"I knew your step, Kate," he said. "You must come and kiss me for I can't come to kiss you."

The next moment his sister's arms were round his neck and her lips pressed to his pale cheek.

She dared not trust herself to speak for fear of breaking down utterly.

In spite of his blindness Glyn was conscious of the struggle she was undergoing. He put her from him almost abruptly.

"Don't let us have any tears, Kate. I can't stand it. We have had enough of sentiment and emotion. It is better to steel one's heart."

Kate drew herself from him with a new pang at her heart. Then she passed her hand gently within his arm.

"I don't want help, Kate. I have learned to be self-reliant. Here is my beat. I walk up and down here by the hour—like a wild beast in a cage."

"Oh Glyn! do not talk in that way," Kate cried.

"Why not?" he said bitterly. "In what is my condition better. What can be a more effectual cage than this blindness? One might as well be in a dungeon as in this eternal darkness."

He was silent for a few moments. Then he suddenly resumed his walk with Kate pacing by his side. Presently he stopped again.

"How is Blanche?" he asked abruptly.

Kate remembered her instructions, though it cost her an effort to carry them out.

"She is very well, Glyn. Very busy as usual."

"And happy?"

"Yes. I hope so. She has a great deal on her hands as you may imagine."

"Plenty to occupy her thoughts. Ah!" Another pause. Then another rapid question. "Forbes, are you there?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Blanche?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how she was looking. You could best judge as you have not seen her for so long?"

"She was looking fairly well."

"Very well?"

"Yes. Very well."

Another turn on the terrace, and then, "Did she ask for me?"

"Naturally she did."

"And I hope you said I was very well. You did not give a bad account of me, I trust."

"I told her what the doctor said of you."

"That there was very little hope."

"He hardly said that. He told me if you could shake off this despondency you might yet recover your sight."

"He said that, did he? Did he tell you how I was to shake it off? Did he give you some medicine for a mind diseased?"

"Come, come, Glyn. You know I never answer you when you talk like that."

"No, you leave me to get out of my fit as I best can. Well, perhaps you are right. This is the way we go on, you see, Kate. He knows me well, I promise you."

Another pause. Blanche had stolen from the window and was within a few yards of where they were walking. She made a sign of caution to Kate. She did not yet wish her presence known. Glyn stopped again.

"You see I was right," he said, striking his stick upon the ground. "You must both admit I was right. I tore myself away from her when I believe if I had made a sign she would have come. I knew that if she had time to think calmly she would come to a different mind—that she would see the folly, the madness of linking her fate with a broken-down wretch like me. I won't say what it has cost me to do this, but you see now—in fact you yourself tell me—that she is well and happy. Therefore you see I was right." A few more rapid steps and then: "You must never let her come here now. It is *I* who must be considered in future. She has regained her peace of mind. Mine is yet to come. And look here," he added almost fiercely, "you must never sympathise with me, never attempt to utter one word of consolation. I want my heart to turn to stone—to stone I tell you. There must be no thought of feeling, of tender emotions, never any more. Never let me hear another word of sympathy until all feelings are dead, dead."

He went on his way quickly in his blindness and misery. Utterly shocked Kate could only stand there weeping.

But a great light came into Blanche's face, a light like the radiance one dreams of in the faces of angels. Still she made no sign except of caution.

"Now you two happy lovers go and take a walk," said Glyn. "Leave me here to take *my* walk alone. I shall get on very well; and mind you are not to fret about me, for I won't have it. Be off, both of you."

They left him without a word, Blanche following them. When they were out of hearing they stopped.

"What are we to do?" asked Forbes.

"Do what he asks you," answered Blanche. "Leave me here to watch him. Only caution the servants not to let him know I am here at all."

They saw she really wished it, and they went. It had been almost more than Kate could bear. They went their way across the grass while Blanche returned to the angle of the terrace and watched unperceived.

CHAPTER LX.

RESCUE.

GLYN stood listening eagerly until the footsteps had died away. Then he turned suddenly towards the stone balustrade of the terrace and stretching his arms over it looked upward, as if in prayer.

Blanche could see his lips moving but no sound was audible. There was a look of utter desolation in his face. She could bear it no longer. She was about to advance when Glyn turned suddenly and began moving slowly towards the house.

What would he say if she made her presence known? Might he not still be obdurate? Might it not cause him to undergo another struggle, even worse than those he had already endured. She wanted to read his heart completely before she ran the risk.

Feeling with his stick before him, he reached the open window, and passed slowly into the house. Blanche stepped on to the turf which bordered the broad gravel walk, and advanced quickly to a point from which she could see into the room.

Glyn passed across the room towards the fire-place and rang the bell. Then he sat down in an easy-chair.

The servant appeared in answer to the bell.

"Is that Parker?" asked Glyn.

"Yes, sir."

"Parker, I have this troublesome ear-ache again. They say laudanum is a good thing. Do you know if there is any in the house?"

"I don't know, sir, but I'll inquire."

The servant departed. Glyn sat quite still in the same attitude. Blanche stood behind a shrub close by the open window, so that she could hear distinctly all that was said in the room.

Parker returned with a small bottle in his hand.

"Mrs. Wyatt had some, sir. What shall I do with it?"

"Do you think you could manage to pour a few drops in my ear?"

"I dare say I can, sir."

"Stay, I just want to do some writing first; then I'll get you to do it, and sit quiet after it for a bit. Leave it on the mantel-piece."

"Yes, sir. I needn't say you must be careful with it, sir."

"Oh, nobody will touch it there; besides, a small quantity like that would do no harm."

"I beg your pardon, sir; there's enough to kill two people in that bottle."

"Well, it will only be for two or three minutes, and no one is likely to come here in that time."

"Very well, sir."

The door closed and Glyn was left alone. For a long time there was no sound. Blanche was afraid to move, almost to breathe, for fear of betraying her presence. Presently there was a long-drawn sigh, and then she heard Glyn rise and his footsteps approaching. He came towards the window again, and she could see him now quite plainly. What would he do during the absence of Forbes and Kate? How would he employ himself? If she could watch him for an hour or so, it would be some indication to her of what his life was, what his future would be. She wished to read his very thoughts.

He came close to a table on which were writing materials. He sat down at it, and with the facility of touch acquired by blind people, he found pen, ink and paper. Stretching the paper before him, he began writing, previously passing his finger over the surface to ascertain if it was a blank sheet.

He paused a moment raising his sightless eyes to the light outside the window. He appeared in deep thought. Then he stooped over the paper, and feeling for the right place on the sheet with the finger of his left hand, began writing. He wrote for several minutes. Slowly, laboriously as if with extreme care. A slight movement of the finger indicated each new line—the practised hand of the artist kept the lines straight although invisible to him. Presently he stopped. Blanche could see that the characters on the paper were traced with marvellous precision for one in Glyn's condition. She had a burning longing to see what he had written. Vague forebodings filled her breast which she had hardly yet realised to herself.

Suddenly Glyn rose. He felt his way towards the window leaving the unfolded sheet upon the table. He passed through the open window. By raising her hand Blanche could have touched him, but still by an effort she restrained herself.

Within a yard of her Glyn stopped. Did some consciousness of

her presence cross his mind? He turned his eyes full upon her. Oh, the sorrow of that look! It never faded from her mind. She held her breath. The rustle of a garment, the movement of a finger might have betrayed her. But there was no breeze. The sunshine lay warm and still upon the ground, and Glyn moved on, and once more leaned over the balustrade of the terrace.

Then, without an instant's hesitation she passed noiselessly through the window and read what lay upon the table. This was what she saw:—

“MY DARLING,—I can no longer endure existence apart from you. I have accomplished the end for which I lived. They tell me you are well and fairly happy; God grant that you may always remain so. Forgive my rash act, and believe that your dear name is the last sound that my lips will utter. May God for ever bless you.—GLYN.”

Her forebodings were realised now. She saw it all with a sickening of heart which almost caused her to drop. The necessity—the dire necessity for instant action was before her. There was no retreating now even if she had wished to, for Glyn's returning form darkened the window. As quick as thought she glided over to the mantelpiece.

The bottle of laudanum was still there, nearly full, as Parker had left it.

The sight restored her, and a desperate calmness succeeded to the anguish of the previous moment. In an instant she had stationed herself close beside where it stood.

Glyn was feeling his way towards the writing-table. He placed his hand upon the sheet of paper, folded it, found an envelope in a case hard by, and placing the paper within it sat down and addressed it with a firm hand.

“God for ever bless her and forgive me my sin,” he said aloud. Then he placed the letter on the table and came towards the mantelpiece.

He passed his hand carefully along the shelf, feeling for the bottle. There was no mistaking his deadly purpose. With white face and quivering lips he laid his fingers on the fatal phial. With his left hand he withdrew the cork, and the next moment was raising the bottle to his lips.

There was a low hysterical cry close beside him, and the bottle was taken from his grasp. Then soft arms were wound about him, and a well-remembered voice sounded in his ear.

“Oh, Glyn, Glyn! my love! my darling! Would you tear yourself from me for ever?”

With a cry of actual terror Glyn sank backward into a chair.

“Blanche!” he cried, with white and conscience-stricken face. “Why are you here?”

“To save you from yourself, Glyn. By the mercy of Heaven to save you from this fearful act. Oh, thank God that I was in time!”

Closer and closer she wound her arms about him and drew his face to hers, and kissed his brow and sightless eyes. There was no mistaking the intensity of her embraces—no mistaking the depth of the love that prompted them.

"This is heaven," murmured Glyn, as he threw his own arms about her, holding her closer and closer to his heart. "My darling, do you mean to tell me you love me still?"

"Love you! Oh, Glyn, dear as you were to me in the old days, my love was weak compared with what I feel for you in your affliction. Oh, Glyn, Glyn, why did you not trust me and believe that I was yours for ever? My darling, let me kiss away the tears from those poor eyes. Let me feel that I shall never, never leave you again, but be yours to help and guide you through your lonely, darkened life. Let me be light and sunshine to you, Glyn, for I have no other hope or wish in this world."

And a wondrous peace fell upon Glyn's heart; and through the darkness and the trouble came the gleam of a great hope.

Once more the summer sunshine is bright over all the woods of Lupton. The cuckoo, with its namesake the flower, has departed; the woodbine is scenting the summer air, and the foxglove raises its dappled spires in every leafy glade.

In the self-same spot where Glyn had set up his easel two summers before he is again at work, gazing with unclouded eyes over the blue distance which seen between the stems of the beeches melts away into infinite space. He is alone, but near at hand is the sound of an unseen companion, moving within the encircling foliage.

He pauses for a noon-day rest, and puts down his palette.

"Blanche?" he calls softly.

"Yes, dear," is the answer from behind the branches.

"Come here; I can't bear you out of my sight for a moment, wife."

Blanche comes from amidst the foliage laden with wild flowers and mosses and trailing ivy.

"I know you will like these for your study, dear," she says. "Does the work try your eyes?"

"Not in the least; but I shall rest them now, and I must have you near me."

She comes and sits on the ground by his side, leaning her head upon his knee. He passes his hand down her soft brown hair until it lights lovingly on her neck.

"Was I not right?" she says. "Does not this repay us for all past troubles?"

For answer he stoops and kisses her on the lips.

THE END.

THE SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

WHEN Mrs. Henry Wood's interesting novel 'Edina' was appearing in the pages of this magazine, the author was besieged by inquiries as to the pronunciation of this unusual Christian name, and she therefore appended a note to one chapter to the effect that the *i* should be given the broad sound. The title of one of her earlier works has exercised its readers in very much the same manner, being invariably rendered 'The Shadow of Ashly-dy-at,' whereas the original locality is called Ash-LYD-yat, or rather (Mrs. Wood having altered the name for purposes of literary disguise) Lydiate Ash.

While Mrs. Wood has taken some slight liberties (to suit the exigencies of her story) with the immediate neighbourhood of the house which gives its name to the book, and therefore renders it occasionally difficult to localise places and scenes, yet so faithful to reality is every word of the story which deals with the country-town of Priors' Ash, that no one who is acquainted with it can have the least difficulty in recognising Bromsgrove. This pretty old town is situated in Worcestershire, in the very heart of that simple, pastoral scenery which the author of 'East Lynne' so dearly loved to depict, and about twelve or fourteen miles from the city of her birth. To the north and east lie the Lickey Hills, a favourite haunt of Birmingham gipsy-parties; and here, in a quiet little valley off the beaten track of the tourist, we find the Lydiate Ash.

The tiny hamlet (if so it can be called) takes its name from the large ash-trees growing at the junction of four lanes, but the epithet "Lydiate" is hard to understand; and in a hollow between the Birmingham and Rubery roads lies the interesting old house which local tradition asserts is the original of the home of the Godolphins. It lies back from the road, surrounded by magnificent old trees. From the front windows, or the broad gravel-walk where poor Thomas used to sit when the weariness of approaching death was upon him, there is a good view of the hill which the novelist crowned with Lady Godolphin's Folly, a domicile which evidently existed only in the story.

I have never seen in the neighbourhood of The Lydiate Ash anything corresponding with the curious bit of scenery connected with the Shadow—the swampy meadow and the arched bridge leading to and from nowhere—nor heard any such legend or tradition as that connected with the Godolphin estate; yet it must strike most readers that the descriptive and material part of the tradition (if not the ghostly) has an unmistakable ring of truth in it; and anything so singular and purposeless as the piece of masonry which reared its

solitary form on the Dark Plain could and would hardly have been imagined even by the most far-fetched of romancers, let alone one who so invariably drew scenery, localities, and characters from life.

The bridge or arch has no particular connection with the tale, and the Shadow would have filled its purpose in the story just as well without it. Now it is well known that artists frequently "compose" their pictures—i.e., instead of representing a landscape just as it existed in nature, put together a group of trees from one place, a stream from another, &c., if such an arrangement accord better with the subject in view; and in like manner do authors, even the most faithful copyists from nature, blend together the various scenes and incidents that have taken their fancy, or will answer their purpose. And this, I imagine, is precisely the case with the book under consideration.

Driving, one glorious spring day, through the lanes which connect the nest of lovely old villages lying to the north east of the Faithful City, I was much struck by the singularity of a bit of scenery which I came upon suddenly, after passing a mile or more of nothing but pink and white orchards. It was a rather swampy, neglected-looking field, in the midst of which was a solitary piece of masonry—an archway, much too high for an ordinary door or gateway, with the bricks broken away at the sides so as to form steps. It could serve no purpose, and, regarded as a bridge, led neither to nor from anything, but was apparently the remains of some large structure. Whether there is any legend or story attached to it, I was not sufficiently long in the neighbourhood to learn; but, on re-reading 'The Shadow of Ashlydyat' some time after, the thought of this spot flashed across my mind; and so exactly does it tally with the mysterious building connected with the death-warning of the Godolphins, that I think there can be little doubt that Mrs. Henry Wood was acquainted with it, and so introduced it into her story in connection with the family legend.

Before leaving for a stroll through the quaint old town of Priors' Ash, we must take a peep at another house, standing at the head of one of the lanes which centre at The Lydiate Ash. Such weird and blood-curdling tales are connected with the house and lane—all most firmly believed in by the country-people hereabouts—that it is a matter of some wonder that it escaped Mrs. Wood's notice. The steep, narrow lane, shut in by unusually high banks, is said to be haunted by *something*, which has eyes of fire, and manifests itself after dark, scaring man and beast alike. No one willingly goes that way after sunset, and a local rustic informed me that he went down the lane one night, being incredulous of the tales he had heard, but he wondered he ever reached home alive, and his dog was as terrified as himself. I could not obtain a clear description of the ghost, nor much information as to what it does, when its nocturnal solitude is disturbed; but, finding that the house has an equally gruesome

reputation, curiosity tempted me and a friend to pay it a visit. It was certainly about as incongruous a time for making acquaintance with a haunted house as could well be imagined, being a hot September morning, with a blazing sun and cloudless sky, so that our impressions of the place were not likely to be influenced in the usual way by the accessories of time or weather.

Yet, when we had forced open the rickety gate, and made our way through the matted bushes overhanging the grass-grown paths, to the front of the house, we felt that it was about as hope-forsaken a spot as we had ever seen. The rows of long, narrow windows had many broken panes; the shutters would have afforded very slight protection against burglars, and the walls were festooned with neglected creepers. It is a good-sized house, and in the days of its prosperity must have been a delightful place to live in; but tradition asserts that for many years no one has been able to occupy it long; the few who have tried to, either having to beat a hasty retreat after one or two nights' experience of its ghostly proprietors, or meeting with premature death.

At the time of our visit it had been quite empty for two years, the last tenant being a gentleman from Birmingham, who scoffed at the local superstition, and determined to lay the ghosts himself. To carry out his plan in the best way, he decided to come a fortnight in advance of his family and servants, and give the place a fair trial, in spite of many warnings from the neighbours. He arrived one night (one or two rooms having been furnished sufficiently for his needs), and was found next day in a state of delirium, from which he never recovered, and his death occurred in about a week—a circumstance which naturally enhanced the evil reputation of the place.

Such was the story told us by a very superior woman living near; and laughing over this and other eerie tales, my friend and I walked about, peering through the dusty windows into the bare rooms, and getting a good view of the hall and staircase through the keyhole and a crack in the front door. Not the slightest sign of human presence did we see, and yet, as we rested on the steps, we heard as distinctly as possible the footsteps of the ghostly inhabitants who have terrified so many would-be tenants—slip-slop, slip-slop, all down the top flight of stairs, across the landing, and down the second flight into the hall.

As soon as we had recovered from the shock of hearing the first sound of the footsteps, one of us kept watch through the keyhole, and the other through a window commanding the upper part of the sunlit staircase; and not so much as a mouse appeared in sight, yet we could trace the progress of the steps (the sound resembling that made by a person wearing down-at-heel slippers) as distinctly as if made by visible human feet. We lingered about some time, and heard steps echoing softly through the deserted rooms above, and at length returned home, wondering what the nocturnal proceedings were like if such as these happened in broad sunshine.

I can offer no explanation, and never heard if there is any old story of the usual kind attached to the house to account for the ghosts, but merely state my personal experience.

But it is time to turn away from the Lydiate Ash and give our attention to "the one street very large," as old Leland puts it, which, with one or two little cross streets, makes up the charming old town of Bromsgrove, *alias* Priors' Ash. It takes rather longer in real life than in fiction to traverse the distance between the two places, but when once in sight of those rows of quaint old houses and shops—large and small, poor and rich, flat-roofed and gabled, stone, brick and timbered all mixed together—we feel that every step is familiar ground.

There is the Bank, still used as such, with the little street at the side leading away to the country. It is quite a show place for tourists nowadays, as it is one of the most beautiful specimens of half-timbered architecture in the land. Up to 1570 it was an inn, the *Hop Pole*, and either then or at some subsequent period was rebuilt in exact imitation of the old style (as to the exterior) and for many a year has been in use as the Old Bank.

Not far off, where the street widens, is the market-place, while the good folk who cannot find stall room under its protecting roof set up their boards and trestles outside. There is no pleasanter walk on a warm, mellow autumn morning, when the grand old trees, for which the place is famous, are assuming "their russet garb," and there is a smell of cyder and a sound of threshing-machines in the air, than a stroll down the High Street when the market is in progress. Oh! those piles and piles of lovely plums, apples and pears, in every shade of red, yellow and green, set off by the "bloomy" purple of the damsons and blackberries: how delicious they look! And then the rows of ducklings, fattened on the wayside brooks which are found everywhere round Priors' Ash; and the hundredweights of golden butter made by the fresh-looking, lady-like "farmeresses" and their daughters, who, in spite of being very well-to-do, are not ashamed to dispense their farm produce themselves; while the substantial men-folk stand about the street discussing the crops or visit the Bank. Just such people they are, simple, good-hearted, though often sharp-tongued, as Mrs. Wood loved to depict in her books; and in listening to the broad Worcestershire jargon, in which they discuss prices and ways and means, we can well understand the panic that would ensue at any suspicion of shakiness in the Bank finances.

Beyond the market-place the street gradually shades off into the country and leads to the railway station, which, as readers of the book well remember, is a good mile and a half from the town.

But the most remarkable feature in Bromsgrove is the Church, All Saints', which plays an equally conspicuous part in the novel. This noble building, part of which dates from the twelfth century, is, with the beautiful linden trees surrounding it, the pride of the town; and

well it may be, for there are not many country churches which surpass it in beauty of design, or situation, or historical interest.

Legendary lore says that it was built on the site of a heathen temple, whose altars often smoked with human sacrifices; but, however that may be, the good people of Bromsgrove turned their attention to Christianity at a very early period, and the flavour of monastic occupancy and rule still lingers about the place like the scent of musk in a drawer. The church registers go back 300 years, and the office of clerk has been in one family, the Roses, for a century and a half. There are monuments, tablets and epitaphs that delight antiquarians; but for the frivolous-minded reader of novels the chief interest centres in the churchyard, that lovely, tree-shaded "Acre of God," to which so many of the *dramatis personæ* of our story were borne. Here is the Lych-gate, where the bearers were wont to rest with their sad burden, and strolling along under the magnificent lindens, on the tombstones we notice many of the surnames (some peculiar to the county) with which readers of Mrs. Wood's books have been made familiar, for her nomenclature was as true Worcestershire as other more important points.

Passing out of the western gate, down two or three little flights of shallow steps, brings us into a curious little street or alley which, following its windings round the churchyard wall, takes us back to the High Street, past the Rectory, the pretty home which poor 'Maria Hastings left with as bright a prospect as ever opened before a bride, to be brought back after a few short years and laid, a broken-hearted woman, beneath the shadow of beautiful All Saints'.

Even the most casual reader of this story must feel that it is no imaginary stage on which the characters are made to move, but that the authoress is familiar with every inch of the ground, and this unconscious (as it were) familiarity with the subject causes her to insert many little touches of faithful local topography, which, though they do not affect the story at all, give it a natural and "living" tone that no imaginary description of scenery or places, however cleverly written, can ever impart to a novel.

It is rather an Irish proceeding to speak last of the opening chapters of the book, but it would not do to omit all reference to the scene pourtrayed therein, as it is one of the most characteristic local bits in the whole work. During the season the Worcestershire hounds frequently meet close to Bromsgrove, when exactly such a scene as that in which we are first introduced to the Godolphins takes place. The townspeople are as devoted to hunting as their country neighbours, and rich and poor of all ranks, mounted and on foot, are still as eager in the pursuit of poor Reynard through the remains of the dense forest which once surrounded Bromsgrove, as their ancestors were in that of the wild boars so abundant there in former ages.

S. M. C.

HERONSCOURT.

I.



ONDON fogs were beginning to hide the opposite side of the Square, and flakes of snow were falling, only to melt in the mud below. My chief friend and companion, Andrew Cassilis, an old man like myself, was out of town. I am an old bachelor of seventy years, and felt rather lonely that Christmas-time, for I think I was the last man left in London. I rang for the lamps, and had the curtains drawn, and then for the second time that afternoon read my brother's letter.

“ Heronscourt, Berkshire.
December 16th, 18—.

“ MY DEAR RUPERT,—Can we prevail upon you to leave London for once and spend Christmas with us? Grace says it is quite three years since you crossed our threshold. We shall have a few friends to keep us cheerful. Violet is at home now; and I particularly wish you to meet the gentleman to whom I have promised her hand. So I hope you will come, and oblige

“ Your affectionate brother,
“ NOEL DORMER.”

Noel was never much of a letter-writer, but what he did say was generally to the point. Grace was his wife, and it was she who had brought him Heronscourt. Noel was six years younger than myself. Violet was their daughter, and only child. I had been very fond of her when she was a little girl; but as she had been abroad at school, I had not seen her for some years. She was now about nineteen. And engaged too! My brother's words to this effect struck me as being peculiar. I made up my mind there and then that I would go to Heronscourt, as I wished to see Violet again. So I wrote next morning to say, that, all being well, I should arrive by the coach at Reading on Monday the 23rd. I arranged to sleep at that town, and the family carriage from Heronscourt was to be sent over for me the next morning.

When Monday came I took my place in the coach. The weather

was bitterly cold, and promised snow; but my good housekeeper saw that I was well wrapped up, and supplied with sundry cordials of her own manufacture.

Before we were half-way to Reading the snow began to come down steadily; and the country soon assumed its winter hue. At O—— my travelling companions all got out; and while fresh horses were being put to, I went into the *Blue Boar* to warm myself, and take a cup of hot negus. The inn parlour had but one occupant, a young

man, who, on seeing me enter, politely drew a chair for me to the fire. I soon



found that this stranger was to be my travelling companion as far as Reading. I don't know why, but I felt pleased that such was to be the case. He bore

a distinguished appearance; was tall, with well-cut features, and, what is but seldom seen in these days, a heavy moustache on the upper lip. He also possessed a pair of the most expressive, kindly blue eyes I had ever seen. His age might be eight-and-twenty. He wore a long, dark cloth pelisse, lined with fur, and his bearing was decidedly military. We conversed pleasantly all the way to Reading. I found that he had been in the thick of it at Waterloo under our good duke; and before that at Salamanca, when but a mere youth. The

incidents that he related made my heart thrill, and I almost felt young again myself.

It was getting dark when we arrived at the inn where I was to pass the night. My companion was going to the house of a friend ; so he took a courteous leave of me, and hurried away. I felt sorry to lose him. This young man had made a deeper impression on my heart than I was aware of, for I am not given to making friends easily, and now that I thought of it, we had not even exchanged cards. But, after all, what did it matter? We might never meet again in this world. Then I fell to wondering whether the good folks at Heronscourt would appear much changed since I saw them last ; and how Violet would like the necklace of pearls I had bought as a present for her. I did not know what young women liked best, but thought that something in that line would not come amiss.

Next morning I patiently waited full two hours over the time Noel had specified for the arrival of his coach. At last I heard the rumble of wheels, and going down to the inn yard saw a yellow chariot driven slowly in ; but the driver was not old Peter, my brother's coachman. So I hailed him, and asked him if he had come for me.

"No, sir," the man replied, "this be Squire Carlyon's coach, from Holwell."

I felt mortified, and turning to re-enter the inn, met Peter, very red in the face, riding up in a great hurry on one of the horses.

"It's a sad pity, sir, but the right fore wheel has come off our coach about two miles out, and we had to leave it at the forge there. It's a bad business as the snow's so deep."

It was of no use fuming about it. The only thing to be done was to hire, and set out as soon as possible. Before I could say so, however, I felt a hand on my arm, and turning, saw my military acquaintance of the previous evening. We shook hands heartily.

"Can I be of any service ?" he asked. "I am just about to set out for home ; and if your destination lies anywhere in my direction I shall only be too happy to give you a seat ?"

"I am going to Heronscourt, about fifteen miles from here," I replied. He started slightly, and suddenly changed colour.

"I pass that place on my way home ; so that will be all right."

I thanked him again, but he replied, with a grave smile, that he ought rather to thank me for my agreeable company.

"My name, I ought to have told you before," I said, "is Rupert Dormer. I am brother to the squire of Heronscourt."

He bowed, gave me one quick penetrating glance ; and then said, "And mine is Carlyon, sir, at your service. My father's place is about three miles beyond Heronscourt."

During the journey to my brother's house, this young man became strangely silent ; I do not mean unpleasantly so ; but the mention of my name seemed to have had some peculiar effect on him, and I did not seek to penetrate the mystery.

At last Heronscourt was reached. The lodge-keeper came out and threw open the great gates, and we passed on up the old avenue of elms, each of which stood silent and white, like some grim sentinel; the sunlight gleaming and scintillating on its frozen boughs. On stopping, the footman sprang down to open the coach door, and I got out. "You will surely come in," I said to Carlyon, "and receive my brother's thanks, as well as my own?"

"No, I am obliged to you," he replied quietly, "I must get home as soon as possible; my father will be impatient." And drawing his glove, he offered me his hand. It was cold as ice. I saw him cast a rapid glance in the direction of the house, and then drive quickly away.

"I will keep my own counsel," I said to myself, "until I see how matters stand. I suspect some mystery."

The hall door was now thrown open, and a troop of dogs of all sizes rushed out and surrounded me.

"Welcome to Heronscourt, my dear Rupert," my brother said, as he wrung my hand. "But how did you come? That was surely not our carriage?"

I told him, as I divested myself of my heavy cape, of the misfortune that had befallen his vehicle, and that I had taken advantage of another, which was coming my way from Reading. Peter was to follow with my portmanteau as soon as he had had the necessary repairs made.

Grace now came forward, and welcomed me cordially. She was still a fine woman, and thought and acted entirely in accordance with the will of her husband.

"Where is Violet?" Noel asked presently, on ushering me into the library, where a bright wood-fire was cheerfully crackling on the hearth.

"She has a bad headache," Grace answered, "and is lying down in her own room."

"Has Sir George come in?" he asked again.

"Yes, Noel, but he said I was not to disturb Violet on his account."

I saw my brother frown and turn impatiently away. He pushed aside with his foot a setter that had taken his place in front of the fire, and sternly bade him begone. Then, smoothing his brow, he inquired respecting my journey. By-and-by he and Grace left me to myself for an hour, to rest after my travels. It was very cheerful sitting there in the large armchair, before the fire; the snow and the cold quite shut out. I must have fallen asleep, for I was awakened by the door being softly opened, and a young lady coming into the room. It was Violet, though I hardly knew her again; she had grown into a woman now. I could see at a glance that she was beautiful.

"Dear Uncle Rupert!" she cried, and the next minute I had her

in my arms, just as I used to do when she was a little girl with rosy cheeks and joyous ways. But where were the roses now? I wondered, as I kissed her, for her face was colourless.

"I am so glad you have come at last," she said. "I have wanted you for five years."

"But you won't want me any longer," I said, in jest, "for I hear that you have someone else."

She turned suddenly to me. "I want you more than ever, uncle," she said, in a low tremulous tone; "but there is the first dinner-bell. I must go and dress. I forgot to tell you that Peter has returned." And she disappeared.

"Was that Violet?" her father asked, as he entered, a moment later.

"Yes," I replied; "how she has grown! But, Noel, I think she looks delicate."

"Now, Rupert," he said, in a provoked tone of voice, "that is nonsense. There is nothing at all the matter with her. I assure you she is quite well. Pray do not put any idea of that kind into her head."

I said no more, but still held my own opinion.

II.

THE guests assembled round the dinner-table that evening, comprised an elderly widow, named Benson, who was a cousin of Grace's; a clergyman and his wife, with their two daughters, lively girls who seemed to know how to talk; Grace's half-brother, Colonel Fenwick; and the young curate of the parish, Mr. Fountain, who seemed devoted to the Misses Pringle; and last, but not least, Sir George Cadger. "My future son-in-law," as Noel termed him. "Heaven forbid!" I said to myself, when I heard his name. When we entered the drawing-room an hour after the ladies had left us, I had a good opportunity of observing the man for whom Violet was destined by her father. He was small and thin, prematurely bald, and with a sprinkling of stiff yellow hair, which stood up from his forehead. He spoke with a lisp, and every sentiment he advanced he ended with a jerky laugh. I thought I had never seen a more miserable specimen of a man, and was mentally comparing him with the fine figure and gentlemanly bearing of my late travelling companion, when looking aside I found the eyes of Violet fixed upon me with a most interested and inquiring expression in them. I smiled, and she came and seated herself next to me on the sofa. How pretty she looked, in her simple white frock, with a wide sash round her waist. I seldom notice women's dress, but there was a refinement about Violet's that drew my attention. I was thinking how my pearls would look on her fair white neck on the morrow,



“VIOLET OBEDIENTLY TOOK HER HARP AND PLAYED AS HER FATHER WISHED.”

which would be Christmas Day. Sir George glanced round to discover what had become of Violet, and seeing her beside me, instantly went and attached himself to the younger Miss Pringle.

"You did not tell me how you managed to get here, Uncle Rupert."

"I had the good fortune, my dear, to fall in with a most gallant young fellow. He travelled with me to Reading; and, on finding the fix I was in, brought me over here in his own carriage."

"How very interesting," said Violet. "I wonder who he was?"

"An officer, I should say. Tall, dark, and handsome. Just the man—if I were a young lady—that I should fall in love with."

Violet had turned rosy-red. "But do you not know his name? Surely he must have told you?"

"Let me see," I said reflectively, "his name was—Car—Car—I think it commenced so."

Violet now turned pale as death, and with a great effort spoke, "Carlyon?"

"Yes, that was it. But you must come and show me the picture we were speaking of at dinner. Is it in the library?" I asked, as her father approached.

"No," he said, "it is in the gallery. Vi, show your uncle the portrait, and then come and play to us. Sir George wishes for some music."

We went to the picture-gallery. "There it is," Violet said, indicating the said picture.

"Never mind the picture," I said. "I only wanted a little fresh air."

Violet looked gratefully at me. "Do you like him?" she asked.

"Who? Carlyon?"

"No," she said, blushing again; "I meant Sir George Cadger."

"My fair niece, I do not wish to be called upon to express my opinion upon Sir George. Carlyon, now, is a man after my own heart."

Here Violet laid her head on my shoulder, and burst into tears. I had much ado to quiet her. I tried scolding, with no avail. Then I fell to praising my young gentleman, and that at last had the desired effect. She smiled through her tears, and then took me into her confidence. It seemed that she and Captain Angus Carlyon had fallen desperately in love with one another, that her father had forbidden him ever to think of his daughter, and had denied him the house. In fact, Violet was never permitted to walk out alone. Indeed, she hated Sir George; but her father insisted on their engagement, as Cadger was a wealthy man, and Carlyon a poor one, with nothing to boast of but an ancient and honourable name. Violet clung to me as she told me all this, and what could I do but comfort her, and wish Cadger at the deuce? So I told her to be brave, and not appear to care. When restored to a suitable frame of

mind, we re-entered the drawing-room, and Violet obediently took her harp, and played as her father wished. Later on the singers came round and were invited into the hall, and supplied with cake and wine. After which they sang a stout carol, and, when that was well over, we all went to bed.

I was awakened next morning by a burst of vocal melody under my window, accompanied by the piercing strains of an execrably handled violin. I then remembered that it was Christmas Day. I wrapped up the velvet case in which the pearl necklace reposed, and writing "With Uncle Rupert's love" on the outside, placed it among the presents by Violet's plate on the breakfast-table. I had the satisfaction of seeing her look delighted with it. She left her seat and came round to me, and gave me the most charming of thanks and kisses. Sir George looked displeased, and elevated his yellow eye-brows, but no one noticed him. As for Noel and Grace, they seemed almost as pleased as Violet. True, it had cost me a small fortune, but I would willingly have given as much again to see the dear girl look so gratified. The Misses Pringle quite overwhelmed her with congratulations.

We all walked through the snow to church, Sir George Cadger escorting Violet, much to her dislike; but as her father approved of the arrangement she offered no resistance. I saw him offer his arm, which she as promptly declined. I had to walk with Mrs. Benson, the widow. How merrily the bells rang across the snow!

After the service sundry doles and loaves of bread were given away to the poorer members of the congregation. I saw Violet exchanging Christmas greetings with the old women, who blessed "her sweet face."

"I can't think," Sir George Cadger said aside to me, "how Violet can stop talking to a parcel of old paupers. It wouldn't do if she were Lady Cadger, I can tell her."

"A fortunate thing, then, for her, that she is not elevated to that dignity," I replied, with some warmth.

He looked at me, in doubt as to my meaning, then sneaked off, and joined Alice Pringle, so that I had the pleasure of walking home with Violet, Colonel Fenwick kindly offering his arm to the widow.

And so Christmas Day passed amid much festivity and rejoicing. It snowed heavily all night and during the next day, Thursday, so that we were all kept close prisoners. A thaw set in, however, and the sun shone out gloriously on the Friday. My brother's guests were all to remain at Heronscourt over New Year's Eve, when Grace purposed giving a dance to welcome in the coming year. Great preparations were being made for it, and as I could not be of any use I asked Violet to drive me out in the pony-chaise. I thought the fresh air, too, might do her good. Sir George Cadger got wind of our intention and insisted on accompanying us, saying that he should drive, as he did not approve of Violet doing so. In fact we should be much safer

with him. Violet looked at me in despair; her father said he was glad that Cadger had thought of it; and so we had to submit.

We had proceeded about a mile and a half on the road to Holwell (where Squire Carlyon resided at The Moat) when Cadger wished to turn up a narrow lane that led to Stockton, a remote and uninteresting village. I wished to catch a glimpse of Carlyon's place, and said I preferred keeping on to Holwell.

"Ah," said Cadger, with a sneer, "that's where that miserable fellow Carlyon lives, isn't it?"

"Sir George Cadger," I replied, sternly, "Captain Carlyon is a friend of mine, and I will not permit you to apply such an epithet to his name in my presence. If you wish to repeat it I will give you an opportunity of doing so elsewhere."

Had Violet not been with us I should have felt inclined to pitch him out into the snow. He turned white and muttered something between his teeth, at the same time giving the pony a couple of savage cuts with the whip, an indignity which this particular pony had never before undergone. The consequence was that he bolted, the chaise swaying from side to side.

"Violet," gasped Sir George, "I shall be killed," and he flung the reins on to her lap. Then rising, he suddenly leapt out into the snow. We had no time to see what became of him, for we dashed on at a furious pace. Violet had taken the reins, and held them firmly. "Do not move," she said to me, in a steady and collected tone of voice; "our best chance is in sitting still."

We had now turned a bend in the road, and were passing the high ivy-covered palings that enclosed a park, when three yards ahead of us a man jumped the fence and suddenly seized the pony by the head. The animal pranced in vain, for our deliverer held him as in a vice. In a few moments the pony was pacified and turned to the bank for a mouthful of grass. Violet and I got out of the carriage. I warmly grasped the hand of Captain Carlyon, for it was he, and then turned to chide our refractory steed. I pretended not to see what was going on, for Carlyon had turned to Violet and was kissing her. In a few minutes I faced about again, and gave Carlyon an account of the way in which our adventure had been brought about, of course omitting the unfortunate mention of his name.

"Violet behaved bravely," I said, as I patted her cheek. "She is just the girl for a soldier's wife."

"I am quite of your opinion, Mr. Dormer," Carlyon replied demurely. Violet blushed furiously, and I saw tears fill her eyes, so I hastened to give a turn to the conversation. We stood talking for full ten minutes longer.

"Now, Captain," I said at last, "if you would not mind driving us back as far as the corner of my brother's park-wall, I shall feel extremely obliged to you, for I think the animal is marked dangerous."

"With the greatest pleasure," Carlyon promptly replied. I saw him look at Violet, and she smiled in return. I insisted on her sitting beside him, and off we went, towards home, the pony behaving like a lamb. Carlyon drove slowly, in fact, permitted the animal to walk. I think they were too happy to talk, and so we jogged on in silence. Nothing was to be seen of Cadger; and when we reached the park-wall, and the Captain got out, I said:

"Shall you be at home to-morrow afternoon, Captain Carlyon, for I think of walking over to see you, and paying my respects to your good father?"

He replied that he should be only too pleased to see me, and that his father, he knew, would be the same. Then we bade each other good-bye, and Violet and I drove on.

"I wish you had married, Uncle Rupert," she said presently, "you would have made such a nice papa."

"I thought of doing so once, my dear, but my sweet girl died, and I never saw another whom I could like as well."

Violet lifted my hand and kissed it. "Poor uncle," was all she said; but there was a world of affection and sympathy in her voice.

When we entered the house we found everything in confusion. Sir George Cadger had been brought home in a neighbour's cart with a sprained ankle. He said he had been thrown out of the pony-carriage! Noel was about to set off in search of us, and Grace was wild with apprehension. How relieved they were at our appearance. Cadger had been removed to his room, and the groom sent off on horseback for the doctor.

III.

NEXT morning, after breakfast, I requested Noel to spare me a few minutes of his time in the library.

"Now, Noel," I said, as soon as he had shut the door, "we came near having a very ugly accident yesterday afternoon. Violet might have been seriously injured."

"Yes," he replied gravely, "I am only too thankful, I assure you, Rupert, that you escaped as you did. But Cadger, the doctor says, will be confined to his room for a week to come."

"So much the better," I growled.

"You don't like him, Rupert?"

"No, I do not. I consider him a very unfit suitor for Violet."

"That is my affair," retorted Noel, walking angrily up and down the room. "He is a rich man, and I am a poor one, and cannot portion my daughter as I would."

"Noel," I replied, "I have been at some trouble in inquiring into Cadger's pecuniary position, and I find his estate is heavily mortgaged,

and that my gentleman has contracted some tolerably heavy gambling debts."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Noel, stopping short in his walk.
"How do you know this?"

"I happen to be acquainted with a man who is intimate with him. I had heard all about him before I came here; and I assure you my information is reliable."

"Why did you not tell me this long before?"

"My dear Noel, how could I possibly tell that Cadger was the man you had in view for Violet?"

Noel groaned, and I continued: "Now I want you to listen quietly to what I have to say. You know that when I adopted Frank, our poor sister Rachel's son, and brought him up to my business in the City, that it was only natural I should do something for him?"

Noel assented, and I went on: "He has not turned out well; wild, in fact, and has disappointed me grievously. I am a rich man, as you know, and have decided to leave the bulk of my money elsewhere. Now, if Violet is allowed to marry the man that I should wish——"

"Carlyon, I suppose?" Noel interrupted, growing angry again.

"You have it. Carlyon I mean; a gentleman, and a man of honour."

"As poor as a church mouse!"

"That is what I am coming to. If Violet does not marry Captain Carlyon, I shall leave the greater part of my property to him."

Noel grew quite red in the face. "And if she does marry him?" he asked.

"In that case," I replied, "I shall settle five hundred a year upon her at once, and sixty thousand to come to her at my death. What more I will not promise."

Noel stared at me in utter astonishment.

"Do you mean it?" he said at last.

"Every word of it," I replied slowly; "but only if she marries Carlyon."

Noel paced the room in silence for full five minutes longer; then turned, and held out his hand to me. "I give in. Indeed I should be a brute to hold out after so generous an offer. She shall marry Carlyon, if he will have her now. And you shall arrange it your own way."

We shook hands, and soon afterwards our interview ended. Violet was not to be told at present; and there was Cadger to settle with.

That afternoon Noel's groom drove me over to the Moat, a fine old mansion built in the reign of Elizabeth, and surrounded by woods, leafless now; but I could see how beautiful the place must be in summer.

I received a hearty welcome from Squire Carlyon, a fine old gentleman of about my own age. The Captain also seemed pleased

to see me. I could see that father and son were deeply attached to each other ; the former regarding the latter with evident pride. I was the bearer of a long epistle from Noel to the Captain, who, asking our indulgence, took it into the window recess to read. I heard him give a quick exclamation of pleasure, while his father cast sundry glances of anxiety in his direction from time to time. When he had read it twice through he asked the Squire to read it also.

"I have no secrets from my father," he said to me with a smile.

The letter was a handsome one for Noel ; and though injury had been done them, Squire Carlyon and his son both possessed generous hearts, and readily forgave where they saw true contrition for an offence. Nay, they went further in this case ; they resolved to forget also.

There was an invitation enclosed, from Noel and Grace to the Captain, to go to Heronscourt for the dance on New Year's Eve, and they would be pleased, they said, if he would lead the opening minuet with Violet.

Tuesday evening arrived ; the preparations were all completed for the reception of the guests invited. Violet looked lovely in a low-necked white satin gown, with sandalled shoes to match. My pearls were round her neck, and they were the only ornament she would wear. She looked happier too owing, no doubt, to the absence of Sir George Cadger, who had mysteriously driven off that morning, without a word of explanation to any one.

According to appointment Angus Carlyon came early, and had a most satisfactory interview with Noel in the library. Then my brother went off to the drawing-room, which had been cleared for dancing, and I called Violet to me in the hall.

"Would you mind, my dear," I said, "fetching my snuff-box from the library table. I am not so active as I used to be."

She ran off, and opened the library door. I heard her stop suddenly, and cry, "Angus !" then the door was shut, and I went off chuckling over the success of my manœuvre. Half-an-hour afterwards they entered the drawing-room, she on his arm, and both radiant. There was a lovely colour in her cheeks as she went straight up to her father and kissed him ; then she came to me and fairly hugged me. What might have happened next I don't know, but the entrance of guests prevented any further demonstration of happiness. Of one thing I am sure, and that is, that Angus and Violet danced far too often together that night.

Just at twelve o'clock there was a cessation of our festivities. The hall-door was opened to let the New Year in, and the next instant the church bells pealed out their joyous welcome. I saw Violet and Angus Carlyon standing hand in hand, looking out over the moonlit park, and heard him whisper as he bent over her, "The New Year, indeed, brings happiness to us, my darling."

THE THIRTEENTH GUEST.

BY ANNA H. DRURY.

CHAPTER III.

“WHAT a lovely creature ! ” thought Ronald Edgecombe. His host being too much occupied to attend to his entertainment, he had wandered about Middlehurst that morning, with the traveller’s instinct of finding out for himself the points best worth seeing, had admired the avenue in the park, sketched the ruined towers, and, in due time, made his way to the church. To the native of a land where the oldest buildings are comparatively modern, this was even more interesting than the remains of the baronial residence ; for though it had gone through the too common vicissitudes of destruction and alteration, there was enough left of the old fourteenth-century work to make it a joy to antiquarians, and ensure its respect in archaeological gatherings. It was an agreeable surprise to find the door open, without having to hunt up clerk or sexton for the keys ; and an elderly woman, who was scouring the stone pavement, evidently took his entrance as a matter of course, only interesting as it might bear on the financial question.

He was too much interested in his investigations to notice when and how her ancient form and pail were exchanged for the vision of beauty that put everything else out of his head—a graceful figure, dressed in some light delicate material, that showed it to advantage, and a face under a shady hat, fairer than any he had ever seen in his life. At the moment of his perceiving her first, she was carrying a basket of flowers to a bench near the vestry-door, on which he had already noticed two large altar vases standing, full of half-dead roses. What a simple affair it all was ! In how many churches in England the same thing was going on at that moment never occurred to Ronald Edgecombe. The whole thing had a mysterious, exquisite charm, from its unexpectedness and novelty, that held him spell-bound.

From his position in the south transept he could see all she did without being seen ; and she, happily for herself, being entirely unconscious, and only mindful of her promise to her friend the Rector’s wife, that she would attend to the altar vases in her absence, went quietly and deftly about her work, as if she both understood and loved it.

He had seen and admired pretty girls at home—had danced, and sleighed, and ridden and skated with maidens fair to see, and pleasant to hear ; but this was something apart—a revelation of what

a face and form could be—such as a man realises once in his life, and knows that the crisis of that life is come.

One thing only perplexed him, and that was that her face was not quite unknown; nor was it till she had quite finished, and was preparing to depart, that a gesture of the head, a quick glance round to be sure of having forgotten nothing, brought back a recollection that solved the mystery.

That young man who was his guide the day before had eyes and features of the same kind, though not approaching hers in expression. He must be the Sebastian to this matchless Viola—and if so——

She was leaving the church, and it suddenly occurred to him that she might lock him in; so he followed her at a discreet distance, hoping the old woman might be at hand, from whom he might ascertain the name of the fair vision. As he approached the porch, he perceived that the young lady was being accosted by a man, and was just in time to hear her say, in a sweet but slightly tremulous voice, "You must know that I can do nothing for you; my father is the proper person to apply to."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Courtland," persisted the new-comer, whom Ronald could not see, "I have spoken to your father, and was very uncivilly treated—very uncivilly, I was. I don't seem to care to address him again till he takes up a very different style, as he will before I've done with him. I suppose you have not changed your mind yet, Miss Courtland, about what I asked you once, and that you wouldn't speak a good word to Mr. Gordon for me, seeing as he can refuse you nothing? It wouldn't have cost you much trouble, and you'll be sorry enough some day—soon, perhaps—that you didn't make me your friend when you might."

There was a thickness in the man's speech that was not lost on Ronald, and which seemed to strike the young lady herself, though she only replied that she had seen no reason to change her mind.

"And you grudge a poor man a chance, when his character is all he has."

"Your only chance, as I told you before, Mr. Darker, is to show you are trying to retrieve your character, not by wanting people to overlook what you have done. To ask any one to put you in a place of trust before you have proved yourself trustworthy, would be so wrong, that I must decline discussing the subject, and beg you to move out of my way."

"Trustworthy—that is the word, Miss Courtland, is it? A man must be strictly honourable in his dealings, pay others their dues because it is their due, and not wait to be found out. Suppose you were just to put that before your respected father, and to see what he thought of it—would you be so good?"

"Would you be so good, sir," interposed an indignant voice over Sabina's shoulder, "as to do what this lady requested, and make yourself scarce this instant, without waiting for me to assist you?"

He had startled them both, but while Sabina drew a long breath of relief, Mr. Darker gave one glance at the young man's face, and took the hint to vanish. By the time Ronald could look out at the door, he was nowhere to be seen.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as he turned back to Sabina. "I should not have presumed to interfere, if I had not seen that the gentleman had taken more than was good for him, and had better be shown that you were not alone."

"Indeed," was her reply, "I am very much obliged to you. It is the first time such a thing has ever happened, and it rather took me by surprise."

A few words of explanation accounted for Ronald's unexpected presence, and it did not take long for Sabina to discover that this courteous stranger was her godfather's new client, whom they were expecting to dinner on Monday. He, in turn, admitted that he saw a likeness to the good-natured fellow-traveller of the day before; and then by an easy transition of ideas, the conversation turned upon the fine old church, and it appeared, on cross-examination, that he had not seen half of it as he ought, and Sabina turned back to point out such beauties or curiosities as a tourist was bound to inspect, and was led, by degrees, to show him the whole building over again. It was always to her a labour of love, but she never met with any one so appreciative as the Laird of Rothavon. What a pity, she thought, that the Rector was away! How he would have enjoyed this intelligent admiration and interest!

As he walked by her side homewards, he looked out for his friend Mr. Darker, but to no purpose. Sabina explained that he had been dismissed for breach of trust, and she was surprised that he should venture to return; only, if he had taken to drinking, he might hardly know what he was about.

"Is there any hope for a case of that kind, do you think? If a man cannot retrieve his character, it is a mockery to speak of it, and yet one would always believe that right is stronger than wrong, and could prevail."

"I should think his chance would be better," said Ronald, "if he had only been tempted by want of money, debt, or pressure of some sort, to embezzle funds, or help himself to cash. It is the breach of trust that makes the case so doubtful—where there is no sense of honour, there is very little to hope."

"I am afraid you are right; but still, if you mention the case to Mr. Gordon, do not let him think I was frightened, or it would set him against the man at once. I should be glad if something could be done to keep him from sinking into utter ruin."

"I will bear your kind wish in mind," was the reply, as they stopped at the gate of the Limes, and Ronald took his leave—walking on, it must be confessed, more like a man in a dream than intent upon business.

Sabina found that luncheon was already on the table, and Mrs. Mervyn, coming out for a word with her in the hall, wondered what had made her so late. Young Mr. Boulthy had been sitting there for nearly an hour. She wanted him to go and amuse himself, but he would stay, and Vivian had never appeared—ah, there he was! (for Vivian had carefully watched for his sister's return, and now turned up in the most natural manner possible).

“Your dear father has not come back, and I am afraid he will forget his luncheon altogether. No, my dear, I am not worrying about Monday—that will come all right, no doubt—but I cannot get his face out of my mind. There was a look in it that reminded me of old days, and I am foolish enough to be nervous, when perhaps there is no reason. I shall be thankful to see him safely back. Yes, Mr. Boulthy, luncheon is ready; will you kindly give me your arm?”

As her grandmother passed on with her guest, Sabina held her brother fast.

“You won't leave him here with me, will you, dear?”

“Honour bright. What's this about the governor? Did *you* notice anything?”

“Yes, though I can hardly say what. It may only be a disappointment about a commission. Perhaps it is some little surprise for you and me.”

“I hope no useless fancy things, costing more than we should spend in a month. What made you so late?”

“I was showing that gentleman the church; Mr. Gordon was too busy to walk with him, and he was finding his way about with a guide-book.”

“The laird? How did you like him?”

“Very much; if he comes on Monday, it will help the whole thing off capitally. Cousin Philip will be charmed to talk to him about churches, and you might get him for tennis, which will please the girls, at any rate.”

“All right, I'll manage. I say,” in a whisper of much emphasis, “I've been writing to Forster; I couldn't wait till Monday, though I cannot send it sooner. I don't mind telling you now: it was on your account he cared so much for me. I doubt if Boulthy would go half as far.”

Mrs. Mervyn's voice calling them both prevented any reply, and Vivian's manner, as he took his place at the table, was that of a hospitable, but exceedingly busy, pre-occupied man. He plied Onslow Boulthy with meat and drink, bidding him make the best of his time, for they were late already, and had a train to meet.

“You remember Canon Jerningham, of course, but you did not see his nieces last time they came. Keen hands at tennis; you will have to stand up for the credit of the place, for they are rather hard to please, and think us mere country bumpkins. Poor things! their case

is a hard one. I am not sure, Sabina, that their grievance does not beat mine. I see what Onslow is going to observe, and he is perfectly right—everybody has some grievance or other, and thinks his worse than his neighbour's; but in this instance I yield the palm to my cousins. Their parents gave them fine-sounding names, as parents will, with the best intentions. I believe they were suggested by a rich old friend, who, instead of making them his heiresses, married his cook. As Boulby was going to say, from the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step. Anyhow, one is called Patricia, and the other Nathalie; and they are known to their friends and relations as Patty and Natty."

"It is hard upon them," said Mrs. Mervyn, "but there are few families from which nicknames have been so carefully kept as your own. Your father always said it was wronging the innocent to cheat children of their names, and I never remember either of you being called by anything else."

"Our rights were in good hands," said Vivian, half in jest, half in earnest. "Well, Boulby, as you are so anxious to see these young ladies, you shall come and meet them at the station. We must start in a few minutes."

"Thanks, awfully. I say," looking at Sabina, "you'll come too?"

"Oh, no," said she cheerfully, for she was charmed with the arrangement. "I see you brought your racket, so you four can try the court at the Hotel, which has been got ready for visitors. Cousin Philip will most likely come on here to see grandmamma, so I shall wait to receive him."

The train was behind its time, as predicted, and poor Boulby had breathing-time before his gallantry was called into action. In his secret soul he felt decidedly aggrieved; he had hoped for a good spell of Sabina's company, and an opportunity of saying what she ought to be glad to hear; and he had been bored by the old lady, and hustled by Courtland, and now should have to do the civil to two girls with ridiculous names—it was enough to make a fellow cut up rusty, and he'd half a mind to do it. But before the other half was forthcoming the train had arrived, and Vivian had found his relations, and was introducing him in such flattering terms that honesty extracted a gruff, "Oh, I say, come now," which the young ladies found very amusing. Vivian's private explanation that he was an only son, with excellent expectations, wanting encouragement, being shy, and good for any amount of tennis, made him at once an interesting object to both, and converted some discontented looks into wreathed smiles. They were quite ready to walk, and leave their boxes to come by the hotel omnibus, and were soon talking at once on either side of their bewildered cavalier, while the Canon detained Vivian a little behind to ask what was the matter with his father.

"He was with me this morning for a short time, and looked ill, I

thought, as if he had more on his brain than was good for him—worrying himself about investments, and wanting my advice. I had to tell him what those poor girls have no idea of—girls never do understand money matters—that my shares in the bank he talked of had been sold out—and some others besides—liabilities having turned up that I never dreamed of. Yes, the old affair—thank God, I was able to meet them, and I trust now the children will bear an unstained name; but it is hard on them that I have to deny them the little pleasures young people think so much of. I was glad to be able to bring them down for the birthday, as I thought a little of Sabina's company would do them good. She understands girls' ways better than I do, and perhaps she would put them in the way of dressing properly on a small allowance. She has done it herself, and everything she wears is becoming."

"As for dressing on an allowance, that is an experiment we have both got to try. Hitherto we have both had none whatever, but on Monday my father is to settle accounts with us, and have no more trouble, I hope, about our expenses."

"He is to settle with you on Monday?"

"Yes; he was good enough to explain it all yesterday, and took us both by surprise. I wish he would not worry himself about it beforehand, but business always does worry him, more or less."

"Not at all an uncommon thing," said the Canon, drily, and changed the conversation.

Was it possible, he thought, that George was in difficulty about this settlement, and had meant to ask his advice, or even something less easy to obtain?

The question had occurred to him before, and would recur again all that afternoon—one of the most wretched George Courtland ever spent.

It was later than usual when he returned home to dinner: the trains were all behind time, and crowded everywhere; he looked tired and ill, but resented inquiry and rejected solicitude, and Mrs. Mervyn was confirmed in her fears. In his ordinary mood he would be the first to apologise for any failure on the cook's part, as being himself to blame for unpunctuality; but this evening he almost seemed on the watch for something to find fault with, as a relief to his irritability. Everything he tasted was either overdone or over-seasoned, or cold or tough, and the messages sent to the cook were of such a nature that Sabina only hoped their judicious parlour-maid would be sensible enough not to deliver them. She glanced at Vivian imploringly, and he tried to make matters better by talking of the afternoon's proceedings: the delight of Patty and Natty in making Boulby's acquaintance, and his look of hopeless bewilderment when sitting between them, and talked to by each alternately. By the time he had made out what Patty meant to say, and was beginning to think of an answer, Natty started off on a fresh tack, and all had to be done over again.

There had been a heavy thunder shower, which stopped their play, and the ground was too wet even when it left off raining, so Boulthy's presence was quite a resource.

"What took Boulthy there at all?" asked Mr. Courtland, roused by the repetition of the name.

"I carried him off to meet the party, sir, or he would have been here still, I think."

"And why should he not be here, if I choose to admit his visits? Is my friend's son not good enough company for you?"

"He is not half bad at bottom, I know, sir; but he can be an awful bore at top. Ask granny."

"I am asking you, not your grandmother. Be good enough to answer a plain question. If I make him welcome here, have you anything to say against it?"

"Certainly not, sir; only—"

"Only he has a slow tongue, and a clumsy figure. Yet I dare say he has good qualities that a sensible woman would turn to account."

"Quite so; I saw that this afternoon."

"You have been turning him into ridicule, I suppose, and setting those silly girls to do the same. I call it very bad taste. I do not believe he ever did anything to be ashamed of: never kept a secret from his father in his life—"

Vivian started as if he had been stung, and his face flushed. Sabina's eyes filled, and Mrs. Mervyn began, in tremulous haste, to talk of the two girls, whom she had seen for a short time before dinner. They had grown and improved very much, she thought, and if only they would speak one at a time, no doubt they could be very pleasant. One thing they wanted her to do, which she hardly knew how to undertake, and that was to persuade their uncle into making them a handsomer allowance; he never *would* see how impossible it was to dress properly on the stingy amount he gave them, and a bill made him so cross—he would go on about it as if it were a crime.

"I did say he must know best, and should have said more if they would have listened."

"I am sure Cousin Philip does all he can," said Sabina. "You have only to look at him to see that his money is not spent on himself. If they say those things to me this evening, I shall speak my mind pretty plainly."

"I'll have no one here this evening," said her father, sharply. "If you want to speak your mind about what does not concern you, go to them; I can see nobody to-night; I have business to attend to. As to Philip, grandmamma, he will go his own way, and won't thank you for interfering. If Onslow Boulthy could marry both his nieces, he would not be the richer; there would always be some horse-leech to drain him dry—though he has no son."

There was silence after this speech, which lasted till dinner was over. No one seemed inclined to linger over dessert; and when

Mrs. Mervyn rose, Mr. Courtland did the same ; ordered his coffee to be taken into his study, and his lamp to be lighted, and retreated to that fortress at once.

His children looked at their grandmother for counsel or comfort, and seeing this, she maintained her self-command.

"Your father is not well, my loves. Vivian, you must go over to the hotel and stop our visitors, and if you *should* see Dr. Warton anywhere by chance, and could give him a hint, he might find an excuse for dropping in. He will understand with half a word."

Vivian nodded, but would not trust himself to speak. Sabina followed him into the verandah, and put her arm in his. "It was not his own self that was so harsh just now ; you know how he appreciated your confidence. Don't think of what he said."

"What he said was true enough—that made it so hard to bear. If he tries it on again I shall run. Our client would give me work in Canada. Did I tell you he turned up when I walked to the church with Cousin Philip ? The way those two talked about corbels, and spandrels, and flying buttresses, and all the rest of it, was a caution ! I had my innings afterwards. He only came over about his Scotch inheritance, but he is charmed with all he has seen here—as Gulliver was with Lilliput, I suppose, as he finds it all in miniature. What a country that must be, and what a life that engineering—camping out in jolly wild places full of game, and by such rivers full of fish ! If we ever do come to smash, as Aunt Christina is always expecting, I vote we go over there."

His laugh as he went away cheered his sister, and he did not observe that though the venetian blind in his father's study was down, the window was still open. The unhappy man within caught the sound, and some of the words, and his heart smote him, as Sabina felt sure it would, for the unprovoked harshness that had turned the poor fellow's frank avowal against himself. He could hardly remember why he had done it, except that wretchedness gave him a sudden impulse to make some one else share his pain ; just like him—whoever trusted him had to take the consequences. Why would men be such fools, and make dishonour so perilously easy ?

His lamp and coffee were brought to him as he desired, the maid, as usual on such warm evenings, leaving the window open, with the blind down. He locked the door behind her, drank his coffee, and leaned back in his easy chair with closed eyes, but without the slightest inclination to sleep. The stimulating draught had changed the oppression of his brain to intense vividness of memory ; as if by an irresistible impulse, he found himself going back to scenes long past, and recalling not only the very words spoken, but the very thoughts and feelings that never came to words.

John Edgecombe, the friend of his boyhood, seemed to be sitting there, looking as he did that day, when he came to announce the success of a patented invention, just sold for a handsome sum ; and

found him in that bitter strait from his unfortunate speculations. He heard his own voice telling his grief at having ruined his children and his own honour as their trustee, and John's hearty proposal, backed by the earnestness that would take no denial, to lend him the amount, without interest and without security. What interest should a man take from his friend, or what security could be stronger than his word? And he had yielded to the affectionate pressure, and accepted the generous relief; but Gordon, who knew his affairs, had supported him in the propriety of giving his bond for the money—nay, had made him pledge his word that the children's fortune should never be risked again, and the loan, if he lived, should be faithfully repaid.

Years had passed since then, and the children had grown up, but how about the payment of the debt? He had fully meant to save, to work, to pinch incessantly till he had the sum in hand, and ample time had been allowed him. His friend had returned to Canada, and their correspondence gradually dropped without his ever being reminded of his obligation; but as he now looked back on his broken resolutions, he could only repeat the old stigma, "Unstable as water." Then came the shock of seeing John's death in the paper, and the dread of an executor's application. But two years more passed away, and none was made; and the old security had crept back, though against the will of conscience.

Gordon had done what he could to gain time; the young man neither knew the name of his debtor, nor the amount of the debt; he had no proof whatever of its existence—nothing but the report of Darker, who had surreptitiously obtained the information. It was as Gordon said, a matter of simple honesty—simple, indeed! How was the money to be got, except by robbing those two of their all? With Boulby's offer ringing in his ears, he had gone from one place to another all that weary afternoon, in the faint hope of finding some resource, but nowhere could it be found. And to tell those children that their imagined independence really meant—

"No!" he said, rising, as if in reply to some one near, "it is asking too much of a man to expect him to be his own prosecutor! Gordon does not know all—no one knows but myself, and if they drive a fellow desperate, they must take the consequences.

He lifted the lamp from the table, and carried it to another near an oaken chest in a corner of the room. This he unlocked, and from the bottom took out a small leather bag. It was locked also, and he was some minutes finding the key on his bunch, too much absorbed to heed that the venetian blind, which had been gently swaying backwards and forwards in the evening breeze, was still more gently lifted for a moment, allowing Sabina to slip in. Although free of that room for many a day, she would not have ventured to do this but for anxiety about his state; and now that she was standing in the shadow, and saw he was busy over the chest, she wished herself safely outside again—so impossible it would be to avoid making him

start. Holding her breath she watched his movements; saw him take out of the black bag a small parcel, tear off the wrappers, and hold up to the lamp a box she had never seen before. The metallic gleam and peculiar outline showed it was no common article, and her only wonder was that it had been there without her knowledge. Could it be something he was unwilling to part with, and that the worry of it, if he thought he must, was making him ill? What was he going to do? He had taken some tools out of the chest, and after a little hesitation, was inserting a chisel under the lid, endeavouring to prise it open. His elbow was dangerously near the lamp—another such movement, and—

“Oh, papa, take care!” she exclaimed, and with one bound placed the lamp in safety. He dropped his tool, turned his glassy eyes upon her in terror, and fell heavily on the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. WARTON had taken Vivian's hint, and armed himself with a handful of carnations for Mrs. Mervyn, as an excuse for his call. He had just reached the gate of the Limes, when Mr. Gordon and his guest came up, returning from an evening stroll. A few words of explanation passed, the two friends agreeing on the point of Courtland's brain wanting rest. Something was on his mind, the doctor believed; but whether he, or Gordon, or Canon Jerningham could deal with it best, was not for him to decide. Before it was decided they were startled by a scream from the house, and a terrified maid-servant came flying down the gravel walk, gasping an entreaty that the doctor would go in directly. Miss Courtland was sure she heard his voice, and master had fallen down in a fainting fit.

“You had better come too, Gordon—we may want help,” said the doctor, as he hurried on, and Ronald, uninvited, followed closely on his host's steps. “I will wait outside,” he said, “but if I can be of use, call me in.” And before he had waited many minutes he was taken at his word. The patient had to be carried upstairs, and the Canadian's strong arms were most welcome. He caught a glimpse, as he passed, of the sweet face that had been before his mind's eye all the afternoon, and heard her thankful exclamation at his kindness; and felt as if he would gladly have carried his burden a mile for such a reward. But George Courtland was a heavy man, and it was as well that there were not many stairs for his bearers to ascend. When he had been laid on his bed, his consciousness began to return; he opened his eyes and asked a few questions, without heeding the answers, till Ronald's voice caught his ear.

“Why, that's John!” he said, trying to get up, but sinking back directly; “he is come after his box, and it is just as he left it. He

would leave it with me, you know—he said he should only lose it or have it stolen. ‘What are friends worth if they do not trust each other—it is safer with you than with me.’ Do you remember saying that, old fellow? You won’t be hard on those children, will you?’

Ronald felt the lawyer’s hand on his arm, and saw Sabina’s eyes fixed on him, so beautiful in their distress, that he would have done anything to give her comfort. “He takes you for your father,” whispered Mr. Gordon; “say something to soothe him, and then go downstairs.”

The doctor’s imperative sign confirming this injunction, the young man drew nearer the bed, and said, cheerfully, “You must go to sleep now, and we will talk to-morrow.” And he laid his hand on that of the sick man, which clutched his convulsively.

“John! John!” he whispered, and Ronald had to stoop down to hear, “make them give me something to prevent my waking again!”

The doctor handed him a glass, which Ronald put to George Courtland’s lips, coaxing him to swallow the draught, with assurances that it would be all right, and the voice appearing to quiet the harassed brain, his features gradually relaxed, and his eyes closed. Obeying the doctor’s sign, Ronald retired, his heart beating fast, and his head in a whirl with the excitement of the new discovery. As he reached the library door, he heard a sudden noise and scuffle, and rushing in, saw two men struggling on the floor, one of whom was Vivian, and the other, who wore a thick great coat, Darker. Vivian was uppermost, and had his hand on the other’s throat; but he was already panting for breath, and would not have been able to maintain his advantage long. The Canadian’s wiry arms settled the matter in two minutes, and while he held the intruder down, Vivian rose with his father’s keys in his hand.

“Just in time—when I came to the window the gentleman was trying which would fit the lock of my father’s bureau. Hold him fast, while I go for the police.”

“I swear to you, Mr. Vivian,” gasped the prisoner, “I am not what you think me, a common thief—my only object was to collect evidence in a just cause, upon my sacred honour—but I own I was wrong, and if you will only overlook it this time—you wouldn’t be hard on a poor man, Mr. Vivian—nobody can tell how soon they may be glad to be let off themselves.”

“I do believe it is Darker. No wonder he is so keen in the cause of justice that he exposes himself to being taken up as a burglar. My dear sir, as an unworthy aspirant to the profession you honour with your services, I would oblige you if I could; but I am afraid I must trouble you to hear what my father has to say first.”

“Not to-night, Mr. Courtland,” said Ronald. “Your father is unwell—taken ill rather suddenly—and I am only afraid of his hearing any noise that may cause excitement. If you will trust this

matter to me, I will see this person off the premises, and take care he gives no more trouble. I know he will go quietly with me—for I shall knock him down if he doesn't."

Vivian waved his hand.

"What a blessing the Colonies are, to be sure! Take him, by all means; only do not trust him farther than you can see him, for he is a slippery dog. I was sure my father was not himself, and the doctor promised to look in. Perhaps this fellow has been worrying him? If he has——"

The prisoner protested his innocence, and pledged himself not to utter a sound till he was quite out of hearing; a promise Ronald took care he should keep.

* * * * *

"My dear, you may say what you like," said Aunt Christina, sipping her tea. She always drove over from her country house to the Limes, and had arrived on Monday afternoon an hour later than she had intended, to her no small aggravation: "Of course, you young people go with the times, and want to turn the world upside down, or inside out, and to vote at elections, and sit in Parliament, and to be lawyers and auctioneers, and tax-gatherers, as well as doctors and dentists, and a nice state of things you will bring about when you are—but you won't persuade me out of my firm conviction that Bank Holidays are the most nonsensical pieces of mischief, and the most mischievous pieces of nonsense that human folly ever devised. If the governors and directors of the Bank of England chose to give a holiday to their clerks and underlings, who work pretty hard, no doubt, well and good, let them do it; but why are they to dictate to us? Why are hundreds of people who never had a five-pound note of their own in their lives, most of them, to be obliged to take holiday because the Bank does—rushing off by excursion trains to places they don't care to see, and which certainly don't care to see *them*—or trapesing about as your housemaids and shop-girls do, with their shoulders up to their ears, and their petticoats trailing a yard behind their heels? Trust them not to let the fine ladies keep a fashion to themselves. It amuses me to hear the mistresses complain of being caricatured. I think to myself, 'If you don't want your maids to be guys, you shouldn't set them the example.' And as I said before, Bank Holidays gave them the chance of throwing away their money, and we are all made uncomfortable for the whims of bank governors, and when you are one-and-twenty years older, my dear, you will see the consequences, if I don't."

Aunt Christina's bark, it was well-known, was worse than her bite, which never got beyond a nibble, that broke no bones; but you had to let her barking go on till it stopped of its own accord. To check it midway only served to start it afresh. Her spleen against the Bank Holiday was accentuated by the conduct of a petted driver, who,

having received the order a fortnight before, had chosen to ignore it, on account of some good-for-nothing races, and leave her to the mercy of a fellow, whose carriage jolted her the whole way, and whose horses had only three decent legs between them—throwing away, as that thankless Job Smither chose to do, the handsome fare that would have helped to keep a roof over his head! Never mind—the next time he was behind with his rent, and his wife came howling to her kitchen-door, they might try what the Bank directors would do to help them. Not a sixpence would they get from *her*.

“And now about your father’s illness, my dear! Your grand-mamma said he had fainted, and she thought he had been doing too much. But he is better, you all think?”

Yes, Sabina could give a favourable report. He had passed a very quiet Sunday, sleeping most of the time; and Dr. Watson spoke hopefully about his being able to appear at dinner. They would have put every one off, but the idea annoyed him so much, they were advised to say no more about it. And at her aunt’s request, she gave a list of the expected visitors.

“I am always glad to meet the Canon, but I shall have hard work to be civil to those girls, for I know they make people believe he treats them shabbily, because he can’t pay their dead mother’s bills, and let them run up others too. They are wild to get married, thinking they can then do as they please; I shan’t envy their husbands. And, my dear,” Aunt Christina hesitated a little as she spoke, “I suppose, though you are both of age, my poor brother has not been well enough to settle with you yet?”

“Yes, aunt; everything was ready, and Mr. Gordon came this morning to see to it.”

“Your Uncle Stephen’s money is safe?”

“Oh, yes;” but Sabina’s eyes fell beneath her aunt’s searching gaze, and Miss Courtland drew her own conclusions.

At this moment Vivian entered the room.

Now Vivian was Aunt Christina’s darling, and knew it; and could take liberties on which no one else ventured; and hold his own in argument without being snubbed, or making her angry; and when she had got him on one side and Sabina on the other, she was not long in persuading them to confide in her discretion—a quality which could always be relied on when trusted. She listened without any comment, though the matter was more serious than she expected, until, between them, they told her all they knew. Cousin Philip and Mr. Gordon had agreed that it was due to them to know the truth, and obtained their father’s leave to tell them, he being unequal to the excitement. Their uncle’s money was there, safe enough, but the debt that had saved it was unpaid, a debt that just amounted to the whole of their little capital. It had been advanced when they were children by a generous friend, without interest, and very little security; and of course, as Gordon said, it was a simple matter of

honesty. Vivian and Sabina had agreed with him ; their father's honour must be cleared, and his mind relieved, and he had been better ever since they had told him so. It was an awful sell—they had felt the ball at their feet for two days, and now it had been pricked and proved to be empty. He tried to speak lightly, but his voice was hoarser than usual. His aunt meanwhile had opened her work-bag, and taken out two envelopes.

" You are a couple of good children, and that is as much as I can venture to observe. I put this money away for you some years ago, and it was one of the most sensible things I ever did. Fifty pounds apiece, to do what you please with—why, my boy, what is it ? "

For Vivian was hugging her as in his juvenile hours of delight. She had taken a load from his spirits—he could pay his own friend at once, in spite of everything. Sabina, who knew what he was thinking of, felt doubly grateful, and was beginning to express her feelings, but was cut short.

" Let that be for the present, my dears ; I want to talk over this matter a little. What you have told me explains several things I did not understand before. I believe I know who the friend was—no one else would have done it. John Edgecombe would have given him all he had in the world, if George had asked for it. He was over in England, I know, just at the time your father was in his worst difficulties, and after he was gone matters seemed to right themselves. John Edgecombe was the man, you may depend upon it. He gave up the army, and married in Canada—his father had property in Scotland. Stay, what name did you mention just now among your guests—was it Rothavon ? He must be one of the family."

The brother and sister looked at each other ; the same conviction was on the mind of both.

" Now," Sabina said, with tears in her eyes, " I understand what dear father was thinking of when he called him ' John ' so piteously in his wandering, and begged him not to be hard on the children. If this gentleman is the sole creditor, we need not fear ; he shall see we do not mean to wrong him, and he will give us time. Thank God that we know the worst."

CHAPTER V.

THE first to arrive, as the dinner hour drew near, were the Misses Jerningham, full of a piece of good fortune that had just befallen them, only requiring their cousin's help to make it complete. Their sole consolation for the family anxiety—sincerely shared by themselves, as they were afraid the party would be put off—had been in beguiling Mr. Boulby to stay and play tennis. It is to be feared they were not very scrupulous in their assurances that Sabina would be sure to join them in the course of the afternoon ; but the purpose

was answered of detaining their cavalier, and they grew more and more confidential over the pleasures they might not enjoy, and the privations they had to put up with, till his compassion was fairly moved. Indeed, he felt more indignant than they were perhaps aware.

"Stingy old beggar, that parson," he told his mother, as soon as he got home, "keeps those jolly girls boxed up in the City, and grudges them the least bit of fun. Can't you write them a note directly, and ask them to the sea? They'll give you no trouble, for they never stop talking, and generally both at once. I don't know what it's all about half the time, nor one from the other, but I hate to have girls bullied."

So Mrs. Boulby, who never refused him anything, sent a note by a groom, asking them to go with her to Folkestone in September; and they had hurried over their toilette in hopes of catching Sabina alone, and entreating her to speak to their uncle about the necessary expense: a matter which, it is needless to say, was from various sources satisfactorily arranged.

It seemed to Sabina Courtland, whenever she recalled that birthday party in after life, as if she had been going through some strange dream—very like reality, but still with an unreal haze about it, from which she could not escape. She went through her part correctly, if mechanically—answered inquiries, and responded to kind good wishes, without blunders or hesitation; but her thoughts would persist in reverting to that past evening in her father's study.

What had he meant to do when she stopped the lamp from falling? He had apparently forgotten all about it for the time; but the horror on his face she could never forget. And all this laughing and talking! Vivian's voice in her ear was a relief; he seemed to understand without explanation.

"Hold up a bit longer," he whispered, "or granny will find you out. I'm just as bad—feel for all the world like Timon of Athens, just before he shied the plates at the heads of his dinner-party."

She drew a long breath. "To me," she said, "it is more like that supper before the guillotine, in Lamartine's 'Girondins.'"

"Or Conachar, flourishing his father's sword at the feast, and funkings the battle that was coming on."

"Or Damocles, with the sword over his own head."

"Yes, any cheerful story of that sort will suit us delightfully. But we must pull through just this once more. By this time next year, perhaps— By the way, what do you think Edgecombe has done?"

"Is he come? I did not see him." The colour had come back into her cheeks, as he failed not to observe.

"No; Gordon left him dressing at railway speed. He had only just returned from Liverpool, where he had been shipping that

rascally Darker off to some chum of his own in Canada, who will give him a fresh start, and a chance of turning honest. Paid his passage and everything. Did you ever know such a fellow? I mean to ask if he cannot get me a start, too—I have done my best to be honest, by writing to old Forster."

"You wish to go to Canada, and what am I to do?"

"Oh, you have one opening left, which it is my duty, as your brother, to see that you do not throw away. Poor Slow is just mad to get a word with you, and it really would be a kindness to take him off his own hands. You had better think of it."

"Vivian!"

But Vivian was gone, and Onslow Boulby stood there in his place, holding up one or two hothouse flowers and a bit of delicate fern, with a murmur of something like "happy returns."

"I brought a lot more," he found courage to say, as his offering was courteously accepted, "but those two—your cousins—boned the rest. I mean they said they must have something to wear in honour of the day, so what could I do?"

"You did quite right, Mr. Boulby; flowers are a real treat to people who live in London."

"I say, Miss Courtland, you know they are coming to us at Folkestone?"

"Yes; it is very kind of Mrs. Boulby to give them such a treat."

"Look here, can't you come too? That would be a treat to other people, I can tell you."

"Quite out of the question, thank you very much. I must really put these flowers in water; they are too lovely to last only one evening."

He followed her to the table in the window, where they were out of hearing of the general public.

"Miss Courtland, they tell me you do not care the least bit in the world for money."

"Do they? Then they make a mistake. Money is very useful, but it is not everything."

"Yes; but it is when a fellow has nothing else. You see, if one is nothing to look at, and can't talk your hat off, and your head after it, as Vivian can, and is stupid about books and pictures and that, what has a fellow to fall back upon but his money, if he has any? I have a lot, and I shall have ever so much more, and I should like you to have the spending of it all—for yourself or Vivian, or anyone you cared about." He had grown hot and red, and yet so much in earnest, that Sabina had never respected him before. She felt, however, that he must not be allowed to go further, and contrived in a few kind but resolute words to express her sense of his generous intentions, and of its being entirely impossible for her to avail herself of them.

"Do not say you have nothing but money; I am sure you have a

kind heart, and I shall hope to see it given to some one who will appreciate its worth."

"Do you mean one of *them*?" he said ruefully, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the sisters. "They are awfully good-natured girls, but I don't know which is which. If I begin to talk to one, the other always cuts in."

"You must manage better at Folkestone," said Sabina, unable to help smiling; and turning decidedly away, she found herself accosted by Ronald Edgecombe.

Had he overheard the conversation? His manner was a little eager and hurried, but the fear of being late might account for that. His first words were of inquiry after Mr. Courtland: would he be well enough to appear? She hoped he would; he was keeping quiet in his study till Dr. Warton came, who would decide about his coming in to dinner.

"My aunt, Miss Courtland, is sitting with him to see he does nothing imprudent, as she is considered nearly as good as a doctor. It was very good of you not to fail us, as she is the one who objects to thirteen at table."

"I felt I was bound to be here," he said, smiling, "and if nothing else would have served, I must have had a special train. Your Bank Holiday arrangements are very puzzling to a stranger. I was as nearly as possible left behind."

"That would please my aunt to hear, as she has a strong objection to bank holidays. It was very good of you to take such a journey for such a purpose."

"I hope it was taken to some purpose; but we should not call that much of a journey. Has Mr. Courtland been told of that man's attempt?"

"No; and curiously enough he does not seem to remember anything about Saturday evening. He was able to transact a little business to-day, and was none the worse for it; but his memory must have been shaken, and we are cautioned not to try and rouse it, unless he asks for help."

"I understand; but are you sure that the sight of me—of a stranger—may not agitate him?" said Ronald, with a solicitude in his voice that was almost tender. He could not have made a more unselfish suggestion, but was prepared to withdraw if it had been thought expedient. Sabina hastened to reassure him; her aunt had been talking to her father about Rothavon, which she had visited when a girl, and he was laughing over her reminiscences.

"When I am able to tell him how good you were that evening——"

Vivian's voice broke in upon the gentle accents to which Ronald was eagerly listening.

"Here is a fresh complication! Perhaps the Dominion can suggest a remedy. The doctor cannot be here to dinner—an accident to an excursion brake will detain him ever so long."

Here was a dilemma, indeed! The very one that had been so carefully provided against. The Canon and Mrs. Mervyn came up while the consultation was going on, and the former undertook to solve the problem.

"You are sure you do not mind it yourself, my dear Canon?" said Mrs. Mervyn.

"My dear lady, I have long been of that wise man's opinion, who said the only reason for objecting to sitting down thirteen at table, would be that there was only dinner enough for twelve."

He walked off to the study, where one visitor after another had already looked in on the invalid. "My dear Christina," he said, "it is most fortunate you are here, as our medical authority has failed us—detained by urgent duty. The young people want you to decide whether George ought to dine with us or not. Will it be safe, do you think? We all want him, of course; but if you forbid the exertion—"

"I don't; he seems so much better, I think it will do him good," said she, pleased with the deference to her opinion.

"That is not enough; you must take the whole responsibility in the doctor's absence."

"Very well; so I will."

"Whatever happens, you give full permission? That is all right. If I were you, I would take him into the dining-room before we all go in, and so avoid fatigue in greeting everybody."

So it was agreed, and Mr. Courtland, looking pale but smiling, was in his place with his sister by his side, when the party assembled round the table. His eyes were a little restless, sometimes rather vacant, but he had a courteous bend of the head for each guest, and nothing special marked that bestowed on Ronald.

His sister, sitting on his left hand, and insisting on sparing him all trouble in carving—she was of the old-fashioned school that took pride in that useful accomplishment—was too busy at first to take any notice of the number of guests; and Sabina's anxieties gradually rolled away like mists before the sun under the influence of Ronald's companionship. With him on one side, and the Canon on the other, she could forget Damocles and the Gironde, and afford to smile at Onslow Boulby's half-comical, half-despairing glances opposite, as he struggled against the difficulty of being talked to by both the Misses Jerningham at once. As for the Canadian, though just off a long journey, he could not have told what he ate or drank; he only felt, rather unreasonably, that he could sit there by Sabina's side for a week; and rejoiced, more and more, that he had shipped that fellow off, and spared her and hers the trouble he meant to give. No one else but Mr. Gordon seemed to know anything about it; and he could be silenced—*should* be, most emphatically, rather than sorrow or loss should fall upon this house. And Sabina, in the intervals of pleasant talk about the wonders of the land he had left,

and the charms of that he was visiting, thought to herself, supposing he knew nothing of the real parties on whom he had a claim, how truly and openly, God helping them, they would deal by him, and let him see that they preferred any loss to that of honour.

Dinner being ended, and the dessert on the table, the General proposed the healths of the brother and sister, paying them each tribute due, but lingering over his compliments to Sabina, as if loth to part with a cherished hope. He had, moreover, a suggestion to make. Two charming young ladies present were going to favour his wife and himself with their company at the seaside in September; why should not the party at the Limes meet them all at Folkestone? ("Hear! hear!" shouted his son, thumping the table, and confiding to the young ladies that the governor was a brick for proposing such a thing. It did not seem to strike them in the same light.) He should say no more, as his old friend must not be bored with speeches, but only wish his two young ones to keep, for the rest of their lives, as pure and good as they were at present.

As everybody drank and bowed to the twins, Aunt Christina gave a start that almost overturned her wineglass. "I declare we *are* thirteen, after all!" she said, in a loud voice of indignant consternation to her neighbour, the Canon.

"Of course we are, and it is all your own doing. I asked you if it was safe for George to come in, and you declared it was, and you would take the consequences. There—Vivian is going to make his speech. While we are about it with our good wishes, one might wish he did not look quite so white, poor lad."

It was, indeed, with no small effort that Vivian pulled himself together to perform his part. He was near enough to notice how his father's hand shook, how forced were his attempts to chat with Mrs. Boulby, how unlike himself he was altogether. But if this took the edge off his spirits, on one hand, it helped him on the other, by the necessity of carrying the whole thing off well; and there was no unsteadiness in his voice as he rose to return thanks. It had, to-day, been his melancholy privilege to do this for two; to deprecate modestly with one hand, and gracefully accept with the other; and since such things must be, he held himself fortunate in having such an audience to address—representing as it did, the Church, the Army, the Law, and the Colonies. In another respect he was also fortunate; on former occasions everything he said had to apply to another as well as himself; but when you talked of "coming of age," that necessarily referred to man alone. Age never came near the fairer sex; whether it were in the blossom of spring, the glow of summer, the ripe sweetness of autumn (his bows to the different ladies were received with laughter and applause), Time might approach them in due season—but Age, never! It was left for those, who like himself, had been for years more of a burden than a staff or stay, to feel on reaching such a period as the present, that it was high

time to come to the front, and take your share in the work or the fighting—whichever might come in the way. He would wish, while thanking them all for himself and his sister, to propose in return the health of the gentleman who had so gallantly come to fill the breach by which an unknown danger might have crept in. If his presence, with the best intentions, had really exposed them to the peril he was meant to stave off—the fault was none of his. (Laughter. Aunt Christina shook her head.) In his country, according to the poet, you had to “Row, brothers, row,” when the rapids were near, and sing hymns at St. Anne’s, wherever that might be, and all he could say was, that if ever he wanted a good oar in his boat, to pull against wind and tide, rapids or no rapids, he should choose just such a brother as his friend, the Laird of Rothavon. (Applause.)

Ronald’s answer was brief, but clear and emphatic. It was a favourite quotation of his father’s that

“No distance breaks the tie of blood,
Brothers are brothers evermore.”

and nowhere was this more applicable than in the land of his birth, where so many talked of England as home, and longed to visit her, if only for a time. For himself he could only say that short as his experience had been, it had been long enough to make him feel that if he sang a hymn at all at St. Anne’s, it would be of thankfulness that he and Canada had rights in England still!

A glance had been exchanged between Mrs. Mervyn and Miss Christina, and neither of them was surprised that as the ladies rose, Mr. Courtland rose with them. He was all right—Vivian would take care of his guests; he should rest in the study till summoned to tea. And he persisted in being left to himself, in spite of the entreaties of his sister and daughter. As they left him, he called the former back.

“You were quite wrong, Christina; we were fourteen at table.”

“My dear George, if you would only count——”

“I tell you, I heard John’s voice distinctly, and I know he was in the room.”

* * * * *

“Just in time for tea? That is some comfort, as I lost my dinner. Quite so, Miss Courtland; Bank holidays are a nuisance to those who get none at all. How is your brother? Eh? What? dined with you, did he? A bold experiment, but I daresay it did him good. My dear Sabina, suppose you and I go and look at him, before you show me your birthday presents, that I may describe them to my wife.”

There was a goodly collection of offerings on one of the tables in the drawing-room, and Sabina had just added a delicate piece of embroidery from the doctor’s pocket, as his wife’s contribution, when her hand lighted on a parcel that she had not observed before. She looked round inquiringly and met Ronald’s eyes—they never rested

long on any one else. He stepped hastily forward, and whispered an explanation, for which he received a smile of glowing gratitude, as she carried the parcel away. If her father had missed nothing, she would only place it where he would see it in the morning. What a mercy that he seemed to have forgotten all about it! She little knew what he had been going through that last half-hour, in the struggle to remember what he had really done.

The tones of Ronald's voice, recalling that of his father, had, indeed, acted as a stimulus to the sluggish memory, and the quotation he knew so well as John's favourite rang in his ears as he sat alone in his study, waking up old associations till he found himself going through that last scene with his dead benefactor, in which he had shown, as he said, what he meant by brotherly trust. He could see his eyes twinkle as he so carefully sealed up the bond in Gordon's office, and locked it up in the Nuremberg casket that Courtland had secured for him at that great sale. "There!" he had said, as he handed the box to his debtor, "it is in safe hands with you, George, and when I want to be paid I shall send you the key."

That casket, so long hidden from everybody's eyes, surely he had seen it lately? Or was it only a dream, that he had been tempted—sorely tempted—to violate the trust, and force that witness to be silent? Gradually the events of Saturday began to grow more distinct; he felt again the protracted agony of those long despairing hours—the rage against the world, himself, the living and the dead, that almost made him wish to sacrifice his daughter, and had actually worked on him to speak cruelly to his son. And afterwards—what had he done? The doubt must be solved at once. He rose and went to the chest, looked in the place where the casket had been, and found it was not there.

"Papa! father dear! it is only Sabina! What is it you want? Have you lost anything? You know I can always find your treasures better than you can yourself. You want the box you were looking at when you were taken ill? Here it is, quite safe. It was stolen that evening and Mr. Ronald Edgecombe has brought it back."

Cheerfully as she spoke, she was thankful the doctor was there, for her father's paleness and agitation alarmed her greatly. By degrees, however, he grew calm, and more himself than he had been for the last three days. A few questions having made him understand better what had taken place, he asked to see the young man, whom Vivian accordingly brought in. George Courtland's reception of him was of that winning kind of cordiality that none of his friends could resist.

"Your father's son had a right to a warmer welcome than I was well enough to give you, I am afraid," he said, "but you have done me a service for which I cannot be grateful enough. I only wonder if it was Darker, that he consented to go."

"It was Darker, sure enough," said Vivian.

"He called himself by that name," said Ronald, "and as I had

reason to believe he meant to be troublesome, I gave him his choice between a free passage and opening for a fresh start, and the police-station. He chose the former, and from some things he said, I am in hopes he meant to do better. It was just as we were parting that he owned to his theft, and restored what he had taken, which looks like repentance."

"Unless, which is just possible, he knew more than was supposed. Did your father never mention that box to you?"

"Now I look at it, sir, I believe that this is the key. He tried to tell me something when he gave it, but it was too late."

There could be no doubt that the workmanship and design of the key he produced was the same as that of the casket. Mr. Courtland looked at his two children with a smile.

"We are all of the same mind, are we not, that whatever claim on us that box contains, we will faithfully discharge. Open it, and let us see."

The box was opened; and in it was a small packet which Ronald took out, examined, and handed to his host.

"My father's writing and seal, I perceive; but it is addressed to you, sir, not to me."

"To me?" George Courtland's hands shook so much, he was obliged to let Vivian break the seals, when two folded papers were discovered, one, a formal quittance of all moneys advanced to George Courtland, full value having been received; the other these lines, which Vivian read aloud:

"DEAR GEORGE,—Brothers do not lend, but go shares. If our children learn to care for each other as their fathers do, I shall be well repaid.

"JOHN EDGECOMBE."

The tears were running down George Courtland's cheeks as he held out his hands to the son of his generous friend. "You see how you have been robbed, my poor boy, but if you can wait—"

"Robbed, sir? My father knew better. He left me your friendship—that is the claim you have all promised to recognise. Treat me as his heir and let me try to show I am not unworthy of the name!"

* * * * *

Miss Courtland had some grounds for maintaining her opinion, as her brother was an invalid for several weeks after that birthday party. Indeed, he was never again as strong as before his attack, though a much gentler and happier man. It was found, during his illness, that he was always less restless when Ronald was in the room; and the Canadian's desire of being as one of the family was granted to his heart's content. How soon other desires arose, and how they too were complied with, our space will not allow us to relate; but it is

well known among the friends of the family that Vivian's health was wonderfully restored by the trip the two made to Canada to wind up Ronald's affairs there ; and that Rothavon, Sabina's Scottish home, is a model of good taste as well as of domestic comfort. Her father takes delight in paying her visits, and always adds some choice specimen of art or ingenuity to the collection which is his pride. But at his especial request, the place of honour is always reserved for the Nuremberg casket ; though no one but Sabina has any idea how nearly it cost him his own.

And Onslow Boulby, you ask. It must be presumed that he was not greatly stricken by the loss of Sabina, and he made such good use of his time at Folkestone that before the fortnight was over he had wooed and won the fair Patty ; and Patty as a matron developed a new character, loving her husband and desiring to keep his love. They were a well-matched couple, and even the General at last declared that, next to Sabina, Patty was the dearest girl in the world, and made the best of wives.



SUPPOSE.

SUPPOSE that it were told some summer's eve,
 Told in some town that looks upon the sea,
 Told by sure token all men must believe,
 That sunset they beheld the last should be
 Which ever in the golden west would leave
 Promise of dawn ; and never more with glee
 Should birds make twittering, as the first beams cleave
 The trembling darkness of the eastern lee—
 Oh ! how along the quay, at every door,
 Would all the people stand, silent and pale,
 Staring with eyes amazed at sea and shore,
 And on each other—how their hearts would fail ;
 How new and strange familiar things would seem
 By the last sunset's last departing gleam !

MARY A. M. MARKS.

THE POPE'S TASTING-GLASS.

THE city of Avignon, so full of memories of the olden time, is situated in a plain where the olive and vine are cultivated, and the scarlet blossoms of the pomegranate are seen beside the orange-trees. Its buildings are fortified against all possibilities of attack, but among them none is so strongly defended as the old palace of the Popes; "more like," as Prosper Merimée says, "to the citadel of an Asiatic prince than the dwelling-place of a Christian priest."

But while he tells of the strength he dwells also on the strange irregularity of the whole building. The towers are not square, the windows are not alike, and to go from one post of defence to another the way is round-about and intricate. In spite of this warlike character gayer memories cling to Avignon, and the old song of the dancers on the bridge points to another side of the character of the inhabitants. Daudet, in his 'Sketches of the Provençaux' tells of their intense love of a joke, that it is an instinct with them, and gives rise to their verb to joke, *galejairer*, and to the frequent description of a favourite, *es uno galejado*.

As in so many southern countries the vintage is the great event of the year, and "Will the season be a favourable one?" "Will the grapes ripen well?" are questions full of interest to all concerned, and the topic most warmly discussed when friends meet. When the new wine has to be tasted and pronounced upon, the resident gentry visit one another, and its merits are talked over with much interest and animation.

Of course the memory of the old Popes is not forgotten. In 1348 the city was sold to Clement VI. by Jeanne, the notorious Queen of Naples, to whom as Countess of Provence it belonged. Clement VI. was quite one to appreciate the good wine grown there, and, as a compliment to those he admitted to taste it with him, he had some glasses made to do it express honour. I came to hear about them, because a gentleman I knew well, not one of the old inhabitants, but one who had purchased an estate in the neighbourhood, went there every year to the vintage. Baron Theurot perfectly entered into all the interests of the place, and identified himself with his neighbours. His great friend was a Monsieur d'Aurillac, and as they both were extensive vine-growers, the friendly contention as to which produced the best wine was carried on every autumn. The country life was delightful to the Baron, who had been ennobled for hard work in the world of science; his little hobby, beyond his vineyards, was collecting antique curiosities of all sorts.

Soon after he came among them his neighbours told him of the Pope's tasting-glasses. Seven of them was known to have been made, and the Baron eagerly desired to see one of them, but it was some time before his wish was gratified. They are in shape like a modern champagne glass, only larger, with twisted stems and a large foot, and inside the bowl on the bottom of each in the very substance of the old glass is engraved a portrait of Pope Clement VI. They are kept as heirlooms and much valued by the proud possessors, but time and the changes that have passed since they were made make it not wonderful that all seven are not now to be seen. Two have disappeared, and only five could be accounted for, but these five were as jealously guarded by the several families that held them as the Luck of Edenhall in its ancestral home.

The glasses were not only valuable in themselves, but thought almost to be gifted with some magical property of appreciation. If the wine was good the Pope at the bottom of each glass smiled and beamed contentedly; if it were a poor vintage his mouth would be drawn down into a sour sneer and his forehead puckered into a frown. And when once we irreverent ones actually filled it with vinegar, I shall never forget the grimaces His Holiness made!

M. d'Aurillac was the proud and happy possessor of one of these celebrated glasses, and by no means indifferent to it. It was kept under lock-and-key in a corner cupboard with a glass door which showed the box that held it; but the Pope's tasting-glass was only to be seen and handled on the rarest occasions, and then with the utmost care. His wife and daughter—he had no son—were not allowed to touch it, not that it was so slight, but so precious. It was always solemnly brought out on the occasion of tasting the new wine at the vintage, and each time as surely as he produced it he attacked the Baron about it.

"Ah! *mon ami*, what would you not give to have a glass like this to taste in?" and he smacked his lips triumphantly.

It was a curious relic, and the Baron was a collector; but at last he used to get a little annoyed at the continual *galejare* about it, and took refuge in retorting: "If it be not broken I will find one of the lost glasses and have one like yours;" but year after year passed, and the old gentleman had always his glass and his joke to himself.

One afternoon before the grapes were ripe, the Baron was caught in a heavy rain as he passed through a little narrow street of a small country town he seldom visited. The storm came on so suddenly, and the rain was so heavy, he looked about him for some shelter, and saw close by a shabby shop for second-hand furniture, kept by a man of whom he had sometimes bought a few old coins. The wife recognising him begged him to come inside for shelter, and he did so, and looked round him wishing to buy a trifle of her for her civility, as her husband was not at home.

"Have you anything new?" he asked.

"No, monsieur, nothing worth showing you ; only some few old things my husband has not had time to look over yet."

The Baron turned to see what they were, old books, old engravings, but not of a kind he cared for. The rain stopped, and he was just preparing to leave, when lo ! a sudden gleam of sunshine fell on the foot of an old glass with a twisted stem, dusty and dim, lying under an old shabby curtain.

Very cautiously, but trembling with anxiety, he drew it out and looked in the bowl. Yes ! there was no mistaking it ; it was one of the two missing glasses, and the blurred image of the old Pope was visible through the dirt and dust that covered it.

"What do you want for this ?" he asked, holding it up.

"Twelve francs," said the woman, half expecting a demur over so exorbitant a price.

The Baron paid the twelve francs gladly, wrapped it up in his handkerchief and carried it home in triumph, only too delighted to have found it.

He kept his secret, but was very eager for the vintage that year, and when at last it did come round and Monsieur d'Aurillac was announced, and came in with his leather case and his usual look of triumph, and pulled out *his* glass with a flourish of trumpets, the Baron looked hypocritically downcast and envious. The usual formula was gone through, the old gentleman rubbed round and round his glass and said : "Now for His Holiness to pronounce upon this," and the Baron's slowness to respond was in itself suspicious.

They sat at a little table, and from the draw on his side he also drew out a glass, and rubbed it round and round carefully, and when he held it up and filled it, the Pope's smile beamed out from a second goblet. Monsieur d'Aurillac's surprise and the Baron's delight may be imagined, when he said quite casually : "I picked this trifle up the other day for a mere song, and I need not trouble you to lend me yours again."

The old gentleman was generous enough to be much pleased that the missing glass had been found, and that his friend was the finder. Sometimes the younger man says he will go in search of the last of the seven ; if he has done so, and succeeded, he has not as yet announced it, but at the moment I write the vintage is not yet ripe.

One friend urged me to make this little incident more romantic ; that the Baron was poor and in love with the daughter of the rich old proprietor, and she only to be allowed to marry the one who should find the lost Tasting-glass ; but as it is perfectly true, I prefer to tell it just as it happened.

M. J. PLARR.



THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "MEMORIALS OF MRS. HENRY WOOD," "LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA," ETC., ETC.

SO it came to pass that after all we left Toledo with regret: Toledo with its scattered charms: its splendid cathedral, ancient walls, Moorish antiquities and remains; its river flowing to the sea through barren lands and wild solitudes. The train steamed towards Madrid, and soon the hills folded themselves about that rocky vision rising out of the vast and silent plain and we saw it no more.

Madrid acts as a wonderful foil to all these old-world towns which surround it within a comparatively short distance. The marvel is that so near the capital, many of them have been so little spoilt. The modern atmosphere to which we now and again returned only threw out all those ancient outlines in greater glory, just as shadows add to the beauty of sunshine. We felt this more strongly on each returning visit, and perhaps never more so than on the day we left it for Avila.

It was early morning. The sun had not so very long shot above the horizon; a mist lay over the land like a mighty vapour, which gradually disappeared as we and the sun made way. Our journey lay past the Escorial, and once more we saw the mighty pile sleeping on the slopes that rose high and wide behind it. Then all that dead and solitary world disappeared as we passed through the cutting between the hills.

Here we entered upon a remarkable bit of railway, passing through no less than forty-four tunnels. The scenery was wild and mountainous, and as we gradually ascended to a height of nearly 5000 feet, it became almost sublime. Far below us reposed the vast plains, intersected by chains of barren hills, with sheltered valleys running between, and here and there a laughing stream. Scarcely a human habitation was in sight; it seemed a deserted world.

Presently, out of this wild solitude, reposing majestically on a precipitous slope of the north side of the sierra, commanding as it were the whole country, Avila came into view. It looked an imperishable fortress, firm and sure, full of dignity, and once more we felt, as in Segovia, that we had captured a prize. Yet few visitors seem to trouble Avila. We were the only passengers left on the platform by that morning train and before we had been many minutes within the walls we had quite a tail of little boys behind us who followed and stared as if we had been unknown curiosities.

It is difficult to moderate one's language in speaking of Avila,

which in some ways possesses charms above any other town in Spain. Walking up the steep hill leading from the station the ancient stronghold loomed above us like a vision of the past. Once more we stood face to face with walls that have seen century after century roll away, bidding time do its worst. They had not the old-world charm of Segovia, the crumbling, irregular, romantic appearance of Toledo, but were sharp and perfect as though built within the century. It was difficult to realise that more than 800 years had passed over them ; and that, exposed to winter winds and summer heat, 3500 feet above the level of the sea, they had escaped all the ravages of time and atmosphere. But built of granite and imperishable masonry, it may well be that if the world revolves for another 5000 years, the walls of Avila will look scarcely more ancient and crumbling than they looked to-day. They are lofty and massive, forty feet high, twelve feet thick, battlemented throughout, and the towers occur at short intervals. Of these there are no less than eighty-six, and ten gateways. So high are the walls that they altogether conceal the town behind them, leaving nothing visible but the tower of the cathedral uprising with its pinnacles and short spire. Battlements excepted, the walls are plain almost to a fault. The gateways are formed by two of the towers being brought nearer to each other, carried up to a greater height, and connected by a battlemented arch. This gives them an air of great strength, but the beauty of special gateways differing in architecture is lost.

In the days when the modern appliances of war were unknown, Avila must have been impregnable. The little town commands the whole surrounding plain, which here begins to be so fertile : a great corn-growing country right up to Leon, where you find yourself within a hundred miles of the Bay of Biscay. On all sides stretch the chains of mountains, in winter snow-capped, across which even to-day an icy wind was blowing, tempered by the brilliant sunshine. No town in Spain is so completely fortified, no town seems so compact. It is small, possessing some 10,000 inhabitants, but within the walls the air of a dead city almost adds to the charm of this wonderful little mediaeval place, which has so few rivals. It is by no means dead, but so few people seem to go abroad that its streets are almost deserted, and in some of them grass grows between the stones. Silence and repose are its characteristics. The shops are more or less empty ; there are no open windows with faces looking out upon the world. Where our tail of little boys sprang from was a mystery.

Arriving, we looked long upon the grey granite walls, with their battlemented towers, regretting that time had neither toned nor softened them. Then we passed within through one of the gateways, and were soon lost in astonishment. Once more we felt in a dream ; once more were taken in spirit into the very heart of the middle ages of the world. But the charm here was not so much in outlines and perspectives ; many of the thoroughfares were almost common-

place and modern; yet almost every street and turn had its mark and sign of a glorious bygone age. Numberless relics met one on every side. Houses with quaint windows; an immense amount of stone carving; pillars and arches innumerable; churches almost more beautiful than those of Segovia.

It is in the possession of these churches that Avila stands out so conspicuously above all other towns. Tradition says it was first called *Abula*, after the mother of Hercules, who founded the city in the year 1660 B.C. The present town was rebuilt in the year 1088 by Don Ramon of Burgundy, son-in-law of Alonso VI., conqueror of Toledo. No finer site could have been chosen. It lies high above the level of the sea, a stronghold of the mountains, and in the days gone by was important in times of war.

The walls were the joint work of a Roman and a Frenchman, and the town bears little trace of Moorish architecture. These walls were commenced in 1090, and in the first year 800 men worked upon them daily. The whole was completed in nine years. We found that one surprise only yielded to another, leaving us bewildered and delighted.

The inn—Hotel des Ingles—was large, rambling, and melancholy, yet better than many we had stopped at—Segovia and Burgos included; for the landlord was civil and conscientious. It was one of those gloomy houses that might have been haunted by a ghost or other supernatural mystery: such as groans in the cellars, red stains on the floors, or blood-curdling sounds in the walls. With such an atmosphere it could not fail to be interesting. We felt that it must have stood for some hundreds of years and seen many dramas and tragedies.

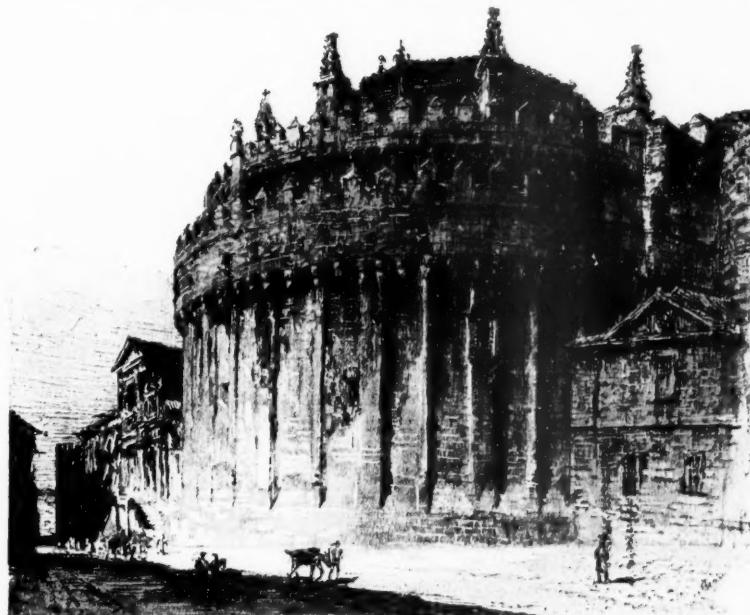
The house was in the small square, opposite the cathedral. As we looked out from the windows, not a creature was visible, the whole place was silent and deserted. But this, as we have just said, only added to the general charm and effect. A great amount of life and movement amidst these splendid monuments of the past would have robbed them of half their character.

The cathedral was commenced in 1091, and took sixteen years to build, as many as 1900 men working upon it at one time. The chief character of the building is twelfth or early thirteenth century, as far as one can judge. The west front is late Gothic, and has nothing remarkable; but the north-west tower is very fine, with bold buttresses and a belfry stage with two windows on each side and crocketed pediments above them. The parapet is battlemented, with a line of rich sunk tracery beneath it. Very fine also is the north doorway which is early perpendicular and has six statues in niches in each jamb, with other statues in the strong buttresses on either side.

But the interior is the marvel. To pass through the west doorway is to pass at once into a profound charm, full of beauty, solemnity and mystery—the exact effect and atmosphere a cathedral should

possess. In this it far, very far exceeded Toledo and Burgos. A great richness and multiplicity of detail, magnificent fittings, all blended so harmoniously that the sense of repose was not disturbed. Lights and shadows abounded. Here and there the gloom was solemn in the last degree; equally so the mystery. Over all was an exquisite tone: the pure colour of the stone of which it was built, softened by age, by the high windows through which the light penetrated; a deep claret, rich and warm, in itself a great charm and adornment. Seldom had interior so impressed us.

The narrow, lofty nave had a single aisle on either side. Looking



BASTION, CATHEDRAL, AVILA.

downwards, the east end was lost in obscurity. Arches and buttresses threw deep shadows which faded in darkness. The clerestory had double rows of windows, broad and round-headed, with richly chevroned arches, but the lower windows were blocked, forming a blind triforium. The light coming only from the upper windows added much to the shadowy effect.

A great beauty in the church was the east end: the double aisles surrounding the choir, the groining of which is carried on slender shafts of extreme beauty. The pillars round the apse are also beautiful, consisting of a bold single column with three detached shafts facing the aisle. The exterior of the apse forms one of the

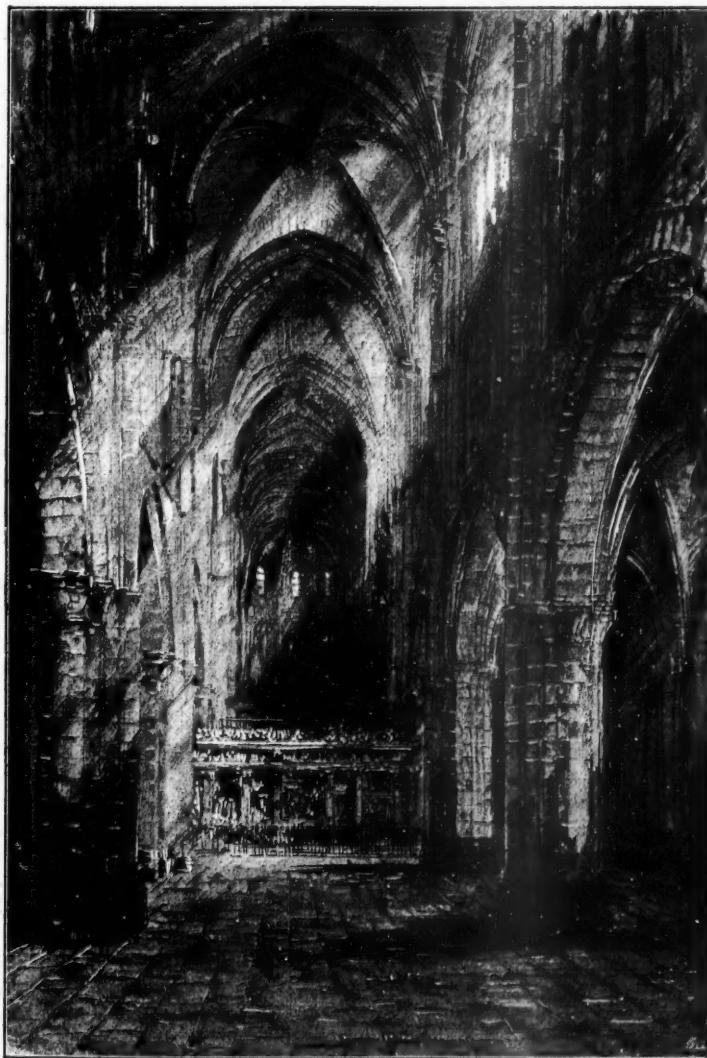
towers of the city walls, a feature probably possessed by no other church in the world ; making it in very truth a "church militant." Amongst the many fine monuments is the tomb of Alfonso Tostado de Madrigal, bishop of Avila about 1450. His effigy in carved alabaster represents him in the act of writing, the delight of the good man's life, who was considered the Solomon of his age. Altogether the Cathedral of Avila is a miracle of beauty, a refined, artistic conception, a dream building ; perhaps only equalled by Barcelona, another of earth's rare architectural visions. Amidst all the wonderful cathedrals of the world we place Barcelona first.

But Avila was full of dreams, turn which way we would. If they are chiefly ecclesiastical, in their splendour one would not wish them otherwise. No change could be for the better. Even the churches of Segovia scarcely came up to those of Avila ; whilst the latter are better placed. Segovia's charms were more or less surrounded by movement ; houses crowded about them ; people constantly went to and fro ; it was life, though quiet life. Avila seems to have done with the world. We never once entered the cathedral and found a soul within it. Even the verger, who generally possesses a spirit of divination and scents his prey afar off, was never visible : and nothing was more remarkable and impressive than the silence and solitude of this wonderful building.

Again in this small town we never lost sight of the vestiges of antiquity ; not antiquity in ruins, but strong, substantial and time-defying. Everywhere the high walls with their battlemented towers were visible ; it was impossible to get away from them. Every turning opened up some surprise, if only an ancient church. It would be hard to forget our first view of San Vicente without the walls. We had just left the silent cathedral, and passing through the great *Puerta del Peso*, somewhat down hill to the left suddenly came upon the Romanesque vision. For a moment we both stood, almost afraid to breathe, lest in the blinking of an eye all should vanish away. But we looked again and still it was there : a pure, beautiful reality, creamy, tropical in tone, marvellously outlined against the blue sky.

The outward effect is very different from that of the cathedral. The one is solemn and sober in colour, as though it had dwelt under northern skies ; the other might have come straight from the burning plains of India. It is dedicated to San Vicente and his two sisters, Sabina and Cristeta, who suffered martyrdom on the same day, in the year 303, on a rock visible in the crypt below the eastern apse. The body of San Vicente was cast to the dogs ; and, says tradition, out of a hole sprang a serpent at a mocking Jew.

The church is cruciform, with three round eastern apses of Norman architecture, and a central lantern with pointed windows. The interior consists of a nave and aisles of six bays. The nave has a triforium and clerestory and is pure Romanesque with pointed vaulting. The



INTERIOR OF CATHEDRAL, AVILA.

apses are very lofty, with engaged shafts between the windows, finished with carved capitals. As in the church of St. Martin in Segovia, so here the whole south wall was adorned by a lofty open cloister built of granite, with semi-circular arches and clustered shafts between each of great beauty and elegance: evidently added at a somewhat later date, probably the middle of the fourteenth century.

The west end is the finest part of the church. The towers, buttressed and arcaded, were never completed, but are almost more beautiful in their unfinished state. They do not open into the church, but are united by a lofty pointed arch of magnificent proportions, which forms a sort of porch to the double doorway of admission. The porch has a vault of eight cells, and is of extreme beauty in all its simplicity of detail and outline. It is massive and full of dignity, throwing into strong relief the richness of the transitional doorway; by many judges considered the finest doorway in the world. It is double with a small round arch over each entrance, whilst a large and very noble round arch encloses the whole. Nothing can exceed this doorway in splendour of ornamentation. Statues of saints are in either jamb below the great arch, which rests upon shafts with richly carved capitals. The whole is formed of beautiful and delicate stone, which looks ready to crumble away at a touch, yet has remained solid through all the centuries. Here we have the very perfection of art; an art lost to the world; for we feel sadly enough that men can never again climb to such heights. We have had our Shakespeares in other ways than literature.

The interior, with its bold, massive columns resting on circular bases, its simple arcades and semi-circular arches with richly carved capitals, was very imposing. Some beautiful *grilles* of delicately wrought ironwork and several wood screens of open trellis-work skilfully copied from the Moorish especially attracted our attention.

It is strange that San Vicente should have been built outside the walls, exposing it to all the fortunes of war. One would think the sole reason for the choice was a desire to erect it over the rock sacred to the martyr, if it were the only church so placed. But San Pedro is also without the walls, and is very similar to San Vicente, though not quite so dream-like and refined. Yet it is splendid and imposing in its simple, massive Romanesque, and its severe interior. All the arches were round and the capitals uncarved, giving a general effect of heaviness and solidity not often equalled.

We entered it for the second time when Vespers were being sung and the evening shadows were falling. A few candles upon the altar, and here and there in the nave and aisles, intensified the gloom, throwing out faint reflections. A small congregation knelt near the chancel, with faces dimly outlined. A little choir of women and girls were singing hymns, and their voices rang through the vaulted ceilings, echoing in the darkest recesses of the round apses, floating about the high lantern over the crossing.



SAN VICENTE, AVILA.

Presently all streamed out, the altar lights were extinguished. We watched the shadows die away, and lingering until all but one solitary candle at the far end threw out a faint gleam, were suddenly brought back to the world by a sound of locking of doors. Having no intention of passing the night here, we glided from behind the columns like ghosts, and intercepted the verger on his way to the sacristy. Real ghosts could not have terrified him more, and he was only too thankful to shuffle hurriedly back, throw wide the door, and get rid of his supernatural visitors.

Before this, however, when the afternoon was still young and the sun high and brilliant, we had walked round the walls, strong, sterling, massive and impregnable, and looked out upon the surrounding plains. Through every gateway we obtained wonderful pictures of the town within. Again and again we contemplated the strange effect of the ecclesiastical bastion, just within which rises the east end of the cathedral in all its Romanesque beauty, supported by massive flying buttresses.

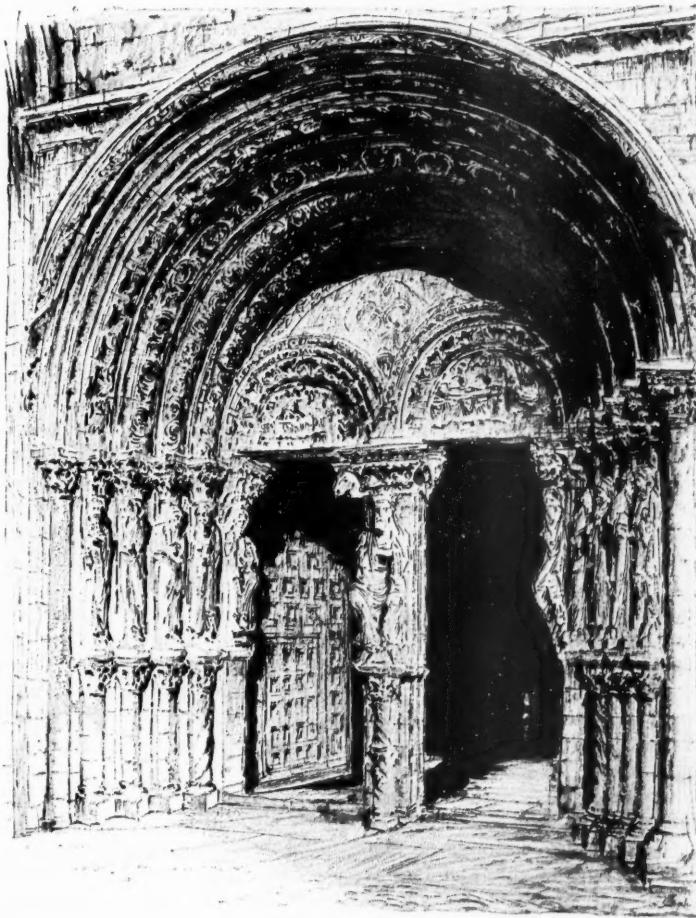
Southwards we traced the course of the Adaja, a long pale silvery stream here and there flashing in the sunshine. Far in the horizon uprose the hills in wavy undulations, where many a secluded valley lies in laughing happiness, watered by rippling trout streams, whose murmurs surely add to the harmony of the spheres. People come from Madrid to these valleys and plains and breezy downs in the heat of summer; and in winter many a dark-eyed, dark-skinned sportsman may be seen wearily trudging homewards at sundown with his bag of wild fowl, having perhaps during the day shot down a stray wolf, which he left quivering in its last throes upon the red-stained slopes.

In the valley to our left stood in quietness and seclusion the church and convent of St. Thomas Aquinas, towards which we bent our steps.

Crossing a picturesque old bridge, and following the white dusty road, a few minutes brought us in front of the great building, founded in 1482 by Ferdinand and Isabella, with funds said to have been furnished from confiscated Jewish property. For long it was a cloistered convent, but is now also used as a seminary for the training of young Dominicans, who are chiefly sent out to the Philippine Islands.

A Dominican brother in cloak and cowl and sandalled shoon opened to us, and bade us wait in the cloister whilst he sought a guide to take us over the church. We found the cloisters large and interesting, in spite of being late Gothic and poor in detail, but the atmosphere of silence and mystery that surrounded them was very evident. Wandering on, we came to a second and smaller cloister, also extremely picturesque. We were looking out upon the shrubs and creepers that grew in the enclosure, upon the outlines of the church rising above them, wondering how many dead and gone monks had paced these corridors in the four hundred years of their

existence, what their thoughts and contemplations as they gazed upon the never-changing scene—when we turned at the sound of a sandalled footstep, and our monkish conductor, keys in hand, approached with a low salutation: a subdued monk, pale and thoughtful-looking, older than the door-keeper, and evidently of greater authority.



WEST DOORWAY, SAN VICENTE.

We followed him into the church, as architecturally interesting as the convent was the opposite. The Coro is placed in a west gallery over an elliptical arch, an arrangement which makes the entrance solemn and impressive. The nave is composed of five

bays, and this gallery fills up the two western bays. The Coro has seventy stalls in flamboyant tracery, without figures, but with richly-carved canopies, whilst two ambons project from the east parapet. Exactly opposite at the east end, the high altar is raised upon a similar arch, with an effect that especially appeals to the members of the Roman church, as suggestive of mystery and sacredness, a greater distance between priest and people. Here distance emphatically lent enchantment to the view.

The effect was admirable, especially from the Coro, where one looked across at the high altar, with all the lower nave lying between. The greatest ornament of that nave is the tomb of Prince Juan, Ferdinand and Isabella's only son, who died at Salamanca in 1497. As we have already recorded, he seemed in contrast to his sister, to have inherited all the wisdom of his parents, and his early loss was a death-blow to their earthly hopes.

The white marble tomb is certainly one of the most beautiful in the world, and the full-length figure of the prince resting upon it is full of grace and religious feeling. It is said to have been finished in 1498, and is the work of Micer Domenico Florentesi. Here in this peaceful valley, surrounded by the hills, under the very shadow of the walls and fortresses that in his day were already ancient, the prince sleeps his last long sleep ; he on whose life so much depended, and by whose death the crown of Spain eventually passed to Austria.

We left the church, the silent tomb, the quiet cloisters, and turned towards the town. The massive fortress stood high above us in the lights and shadows cast by the sun. On our way we passed the Carmelite convent and church, containing relics of St. Teresa and the tomb of her brother Lorenzo de Cepeda. In the nunnery garden there is an apple-tree said to have been planted by her. She was born in Avila, where a church is erected over her birth-place. It is said that from the age of seven her ambition was to go to Africa and suffer martyrdom. At the age of twenty she became a nun, and founded seventeen convents of bare-footed Carmelites. She died on the 4th of October, 1582, and is one of the leading saints in the Spanish calendar.

Our stay in Avila was numbered by hours. Having no just conception of its splendours, we had formed our plans ; and arriving in the morning, left late at night. But how gladly would we have devoted days to this charmed atmosphere. Like Segovia, it stands out as one of earth's rare treasure-houses, matchless and unrivalled. Many an old palace reposes in silent dignity, reflecting a past glory. Every street has a relic of the middle ages to redeem it from the prosy atmosphere of to-day. Its churches are marvellously well placed, and in close contact with the magnificent walls form never to be forgotten pictures. Once more we felt we had been in dreamland, passing through experiences almost vague and intangible.

in their refined beauty ; and we longed for the day when we might spend so much time here as should establish these artistic, old-world treasures in our minds as realities, not mere dream visions.



SALAMANCA FROM THE RIVER.

But we had other experiences in Avila.

The sun went down whilst we were listening to the sweet voices of the choir in San Pedro. An intense coldness had crept through the

aisles, keen as though we had suddenly passed from summer to winter. This proved nothing to the cold when we left the church. Darkness had fallen and a wind blew sharp and cutting enough to herald straight from the North Pole over icy seas and mountains. A great coat, a thick rug thrown over the shoulders, made no difference whatever: it penetrated through all. The blast rushing over the snow-capped Sierra crossed this little town 3500 feet above sea-level, and spared it not. Many of the inhabitants looked pale, sickly and consumptive, and we did not wonder. Midday had been glorious summer, this was worse than the bitterest winter we could remember. It rushed through the narrow streets, and the poor Spaniards, men, women and children, shivered as they hurried along and drew their cloaks about them. The children for the most part had no cloaks and looked pinched and miserable. Soon not a soul was to be seen.

We gladly turned in to the hotel at the dinner-hour, and never was boiling soup more acceptable. The room was ill-lighted, the appointments were very rough, the few people at table were rough also and primitive, the savoury viands appealed to anyone rather than to Englishmen, the waiters were clumsy and unintelligent. Yet we were thankful for the shelter; for such food as was not a delectable combination of garlic and rancid oil, and for the wine which restored one's frozen circulation.

Thus fortified we braved the elements once more, and in spite of the icy blast wandered about, and revelled in all the old-world outlines of cathedral, churches, walls, gateways and palaces, that now loomed out in all the mystery of night. Outside the walls we could only imagine the vast plains, the towering hills that stretched around, for the darkness was Egyptian.

And from out that darkness presently a lantern gleamed, a tall form wrapped in what looked like a dozen great coats uprose gigantically, and a deep voice called out the hour and the weather. We had found another old watchman, who altogether harmonised with the scene; and apparently we had the world to ourselves. The hour was growing late, and everyone in Avila seemed to have gone to rest. At the first moment he turned his light upon us and looked suspiciously, wondering perhaps whether we were brigands from the neighbouring hills. We could not be mistaken for anything but men of peace, and the flash was withdrawn.

"A cold night, noble sirs, to be out in. I see you are strangers," said this Diogenes.

"And strangers we would remain if this is a specimen of your climate," we replied.

"A fair specimen of what we must go through for the rest of the winter," said the watchman; "only that presently it will be worse than this, though to-night is keen. As you see, I am clothed and fortified against the cold, or I could not play the watchman."

"But surely you are not wanted in this small town? These walls

must be sufficient safeguard against thieves and robbers and all other powers of darkness?"

"I am of that opinion," said Diogenes, "but I proclaim it not.



ARCADES, SALAMANCA.

Why should I cry down my occupation and so play the part of a fool? It is an ancient custom, worshipful gentlemen, and the town will have it so. There might be occasions too——"

"Such as to-night," we interrupted, laughing, "when you come upon two suspicious prowlers and flash your light upon them."

"I crave your highnesses' pardon," returned our watchman, who seemed to possess the Spaniard's love for titles. "In truth this is a quiet town, and seldom do I meet friend or foe on such a night. One would not turn out a dog in it, and that anyone should be abroad for pleasure—"

"Passes man's comprehension," we again interrupted. "But, good Diogenes, we are men of peace, whilst you are a mighty man of valour. Administer to thyself something warm and comforting," gliding a silver charm into his capacious palm, whilst a ruder blast than ever caused us all to shiver visibly. "Surely Avila possesses few such sons, and it behoves you to be careful of your life."

"Your highnesses are noble indeed," returned Diogenes in the effusion of his heart. "Would that I could more often flash my light upon such wanderers. If I were a devout Catholic I would burn a candle and say a prayer to St. Teresa in your honour: but alas, they tell me I am no better than a heathen, because I will not believe in candles and relics; a finger of San Salvador and a toe of San Nicholas. Santa Maria! There is my religion," pointing to the sky and the stars, "and I say a prayer as I walk the streets in the night hours to Him who made the world. I don't believe in priests, saints and incense—and so they call me heretic."

We were standing near the wonderful church of San Vicente, which rose up, a black mass against the night sky, a halo of romance surrounding its faint outlines of which we knew the full beauty and splendour. Beyond, towered the walls, with one of the massive gateways of which we could dimly trace the clear-cut battlements. The old watchman, one of the biggest men we had ever seen, came into these surroundings with a touch of life that harmonised with them to perfection. He bade us good-night, a fair voyage and a return to Avila, and we watched him slowly move away with footsteps that ought to have made the earth tremble, his voice rolling like a deep diapason as he disappeared down the echoing streets.

Then we turned ourselves in the opposite direction, and passing near the ecclesiastical bastion, crossed the quiet cathedral square where reigned the silence and solitude of the witching hour. Presently that silence was disturbed. Up came the hotel omnibus; lamps gleamed and flashed. The scene was weird and telling, but we were glad to escape inside from the cutting blast. Two passengers honoured us; one an officer of some sort in uniform, the other the post-boy in charge of the mail-bags. The door was slammed to; the civil landlord attended us to the last, wished us a good voyage and "the favour of our recommendation," and with a sound of artillery we rattled through the streets, passed beyond the walls and down the steep hill.

At the station a small crowd of rough country people waited,

with not a feature of interest about them. Keen as ever was the wind as we stood in patience, and with joy at length saw a fiery red eye as of an approaching monster, looming out of the blackness of darkness. It puffed and snorted up to the platform, swallowed up all the waiting passengers, and moved on with its added burden. For us Avila was of the past, and we felt that we were leaving behind us such a vision as we should not easily find again.

Our present journey might be called an unequal triangle, of which Avila was one point, Salamanca another, Valladolid the third and last. We travelled on in the night darkness, reaching our second point, Salamanca, about four o'clock in the morning. It was still dark, but the intense coldness of Avila had quite disappeared. The hotel omnibus rattled through streets of which we saw nothing. A sleepy porter with electrified hair and shuffling gait opened to us after keeping us waiting whilst he made up his mind whether to answer the summons or turn again in slumber. He had just sufficient sense left to show us to rooms, where we soon journeyed to the land of dreams: only to be awakened at daylight by a barbarous and inhuman crashing and clashing of bells.

This was to remind the faithful inhabitants that they must not expect peace in this world. The air seemed full of bells, as if all the



HOUSE OF THE SHELLS, SALAMANCA.

churches in the town had suddenly gone raving mad. The noise never ceased, and at last we got up, dressed and looked upon the outer scene. It was Sunday morning. In front of us was a small square, and one of the offending churches stood on the left. We watched the bell swinging furiously to and fro as though in possession of a legion of imps. To us who had hoped for a short repose it was nothing less than torment. At eight o'clock all the bells obligingly stopped for a time, knowing their inquisitorial work was accomplished.

We had somehow expected a great deal of Salamanca, and were disappointed. Historically it goes back to remote ages, and was an ancient city of the *Vettones*, but here if anywhere time has withheld his beautifying hand. Lying amidst the Iberian hills, it was supposed to derive its name from Elman the Iberian god of war. Plutarch relates how Hannibal raised its siege, and how the Spaniards failing to pay their indemnity, Hannibal returned to sack the town. The men were to come out unarmed, but the women followed with concealed weapons, and when the plunderers rushed in to their work the women armed the men with swords, and they turned and slew many of the enemy.

The Romans made it a military station. Under the Goths it attained further prosperity, and money was coined here. Next came the Moors who were not likely to let so rich a prize escape, and injured it much. In 1055 it was reconquered by the Spaniards, and then for many ages the town had comparative peace. In the days of Ferdinand and Isabella it rose to greater prosperity and distinction. Early in the present century came the French Invasion, when it was almost ruined. Twenty-five convents and as many colleges were destroyed, and their ancient timbers and carved panels were turned into firewood. What Salamanca might have been but for this, it is difficult to say. Wellington came, but not in time to save it. Four miles out of the town the famous battle was fought, on the 22nd of July, 1812. In that battle the French lost 12,000 men, the Allies 5000, of whom 3000 were English. It was said that "Wellington defeated 40,000 men in forty minutes." He was made a Marquis and a sum of £100,000 was given to him wherewith to purchase estates. The French lost heart, Soult raised the siege of Cadiz and forsook the South of Spain. Napoleon was with his armies in Russia, and he, superstitious with all his courage, began to lose heart also, and to think that the tide of his fortunes had turned. As indeed it had.

Salamanca was made a university town by Alonzo IX, King of Leon. The first university in Castile had been founded by Alonzo VIII. in Palencia. Ferdinand united the two kingdoms, and the united universities received new and extended statutes and privileges in 1243. In 1414 it was decided at the council of Constance that Oxford should take precedence of Salamanca. This was chiefly due to Henry de Abandon, warden of Merton, and the Spaniards never forgave the decision. In early days Salamanca was governed by

a Rector, who held the office for one year with almost despotic power. As a university town it was most flourishing in the fourteenth century, when it had 10,000 students. In the sixteenth century it numbered only 5000. At the French invasion it suffered still more, and now has only about 1400. It was at Salamanca that bigoted Philip II. married Maria of Portugal in 1543, and probably few envied the unhappy queen her husband. On that great occasion the



HOUSE OF THE SHELLS, SALAMANCA.

whole city outdid itself in bull-fights, in order to conciliate Philip for resisting his father in 1521. Valloria, a maker of wine pigskins had been leader of the outbreak, and had plundered the whole town so effectually that the mob took an oath of allegiance in the following words: "We swear before Heaven to recognise no king or pope but Valloria." It is consoling to know that long before the year was out, Valloria had met with his just punishment on the gibbet.

So the Salamanca of to-day is not the Salamanca of the past. Its streets are disappointing. Though it has many a fine old bit, and some large and important buildings, most of them are in a bad renaissance style. One of the most interesting is the house of the shells, with its quaint windows and ancient ironwork. Its two cathedrals are of course the most imposing of its churches: the old and the new: the one small and compact, the other somewhat overpowering in size: the one an architectural gem, the other, disappointing, unsatisfying, without sense of beauty, atmosphere of devotion, or mystery and romance.

The old cathedral was founded in the twelfth century, soon after the town had been retaken from the Moors. The new cathedral on the other hand, dates from the sixteenth century. The one adjoins the other, so that one party wall suffices for the two. The first was built, though not absolutely founded, by Geronimo, confessor to the cruel Cid and his faithful Ximena, after he became Bishop of Salamanca. The first mass was celebrated in the year 1100, and in the new cathedral in 1560.

The older building is Romanesque, plain and massive, and remains very much in its original state. It is cruciform with three eastern apses, and a singularly beautiful and effective central dome over the crossing. This dome is raised upon two stages of refined arcades, some of them pierced with windows, so that a sufficiency of light admirably shows up the details. The dome-like character of the vault is somewhat destroyed by a series of groining ribs sixteen in number, which rest upon slender shafts with delicately-carved capitals.

On the exterior the dome form is not followed out. The roof composed of glazed tiles is octagonal, and rises to a point, a rare but striking detail. Outwardly this is raised upon arcades of pure Romanesque work, with a pinnacle-turret at each corner. The whole forms an enchanting picture, standing out in absolute contrast with every other detail of the two cathedrals. The main arches of the interior are pointed, those of the windows semi-circular. The capitals are richly carved. The west porch is very deep and fine.

A flight of steps led up into the new cathedral, which is built on a somewhat higher level. Passing from one to the other was to leave an old world-dream of beauty and charm for a comparatively commonplace, uninteresting atmosphere. The old cathedral only shows forth the poverty of the new, which has no vigour or beauty about it, and produces no effect.

More than ever, in gazing upon Salamanca, we rejoiced that beautiful, dignified and imposing Segovia had fallen into the hands of Hontañon the son. Outwardly the cathedrals bear a certain faint resemblance to each other, and the combined outlines are decidedly striking. Salamanca owes its great charm to its situation. Outside its walls runs the fine river Tormes, spanned by one of the famous bridges of the world, composed of twenty-six arches, full of the beauty and

tone of age. This river, rising in the Sierra de Gredos, flows single and solitary for 135 miles; then joins a second river, and the two become one broad stream flowing at the feet of the ancient university town and reflecting its splendid outlines.

Standing on the further bank, the city rises majestically above the flowing water, and the arched bridge composes wonderfully well in the foreground. From this point of view it is an exquisite picture of dilapidation, age and decay. Nothing can be more picturesque. The walls appear ready to crumble away. Houses apparently in the very last stage of existence, look as though the first winter wind would bring them to the ground.

Above these outlines, the joined outlines of the two cathedrals rise in fine contrast. Whatever is objectionable in the way of detail is here lost. One sees only an assemblage of domes, towers and turrets standing out clearly and distinctly against a background of clear sky. Again distance lends enchantment to the view, and here we feel is something to charm; a picture and a recollection to carry away with one, unique of its kind. The lovely, creamy, almost tropical colour of the stone used for the cathedral and for many of the houses adds very much to the warmth and general effect of the whole.

In contrast with all this is the grey tone of the old bridge over which troops of mules with their owners in gay holiday attire—for it is Sunday—are for ever going to and fro. On the bank of the river a long line of washerwomen—there must be at least two hundred of them—are hard at work. As we look down from one of the deep recesses of the bridge to which we have moved they form a line of wonderfully bright colouring in the landscape, and laughing, chattering and working, appear happy as the day is long. One of them looking up, catches H. C.'s intent, admiring gaze—given, it must be admitted, to the general not the individual effect. She laughs aloud, passes the word down the line, and immediately about a hundred of them spring up, their heads all the colours of the rainbow, they shout him a good-day and boldly challenge him to the waterside. He is wise enough to resist the invitation and spare the penalty.

We pass on into the town, coming here and there upon picturesque bits of old and dilapidated houses, with red-tiled roofs and eaves and dormer windows, many an ancient and artistic bit of old ironwork, and balconies where rags are hanging out to dry or flowers are blooming according to the fancy of the owner. It is outside her walls that Salamanca is distinctly beautiful. Within them, the charm fades into a heavy, lifeless town, with few mediæval outlines. Church after church is disappointing, and street after street commonplace. At sundown the great square, with its arcades, is the popular promenade for all who can spare the time—a sauntering crowd. But it is comparatively modern, the ancient market-place, with its quaint and curious arcades, thrown by the sun into deep slanting lights and shadows as he travels southwards is more interesting.

At the end of one of them we looked upon a most curious, most dramatic effect. The long arcade with its pillars and arches reposed in gloom, and out of the far-off deep obscurity a cross seemed suddenly to shine with startling and mysterious clearness. The cause for this strange appearance was not visible, the result seemed almost supernatural; and as we looked down the long dark vista transformed by this strange apparition, we almost felt that a vision of the unseen world had been opened to us. We found the explanation simple enough when we passed under the arches and examined it: the partial opening of some great doors, through which broad streaks of daylight penetrated in the form of a calvary; a little more opening or a little less, and the effect would have been lost.

Our quarters in Salamanca were not refined or comfortable. It was a curious house with various staircases and long rambling passages, in which one perpetually went astray. Once we turned into a wrong room, which might have belonged to Faust or one of his disciples. Evidently some one lived here all the year round; the room was not given up to birds of passage. It was a combination of the domestic and the horrible. Photographs of people in public and private life crowded the mantelpiece and the walls. A skeleton grinned horribly at us from a corner, and as we looked and trembled it seemed to rattle all its bones, and glare at us from vacant sockets, and move its jaws up and down with a sound of castanets. "Mortals, beware! Such as I am, so will ye be!" These awful words seemed to ring out from that voiceless throat and float about the room. On the table was a death's head and cross-bones, and near them an open book. Was this the abode of another St. Jerome, who in the midst of life contemplated death and the mutability of all things? But no; St. Jerome would never have decorated his cell with photographs of houris in bloomer costumes. And the book was not a devotional treatise for the healing of the soul, but a learned Latin disquisition upon potent herbs for the restoration of the body. Evidently the owner of this strange abode was a doctor.

We made a propitiatory bow to the skeleton, and as we hastily closed the door thought we heard shrieks of mocking supernatural laughter thrown after us by the awful apparition.

Into every part of the house and its dark corridors there penetrated the horrible fumes of rancid oil issuing from unseen kitchens, where the chef seemed for ever engaged in labours unceasing as those of Sisyphus. To our room they brought us tea made with tepid water, and in the deep caverns of the tea-pot we counted exactly five-and-twenty tea-leaves. One morning waking up in the unutterable agonies of headache, this decoction was produced as a panacea for all ills. We desperately ordered boiling water, made a strong infusion of priceless tea-tabloids presented to us before leaving England by a dear and thoughtful Samaritan—and convalescence ensued. This pungent odour was never absent, but it was of use in reconciling us to the

very indifferent fare of the dining-room and the matchless stupidity of the waiters.

Altogether we were not sorry to leave this Salamanca from which we had expected so much and received so little. How infinitely greater had been the charms and treasures of Avila, to which we longed to return. That, however, was impossible ; we were committed to the third point of our unequal triangle, and started one fine day for Valladolid. Here too we had a right to expect much. Centuries



OLD HOUSES, SALAMANCA.

ago it was the capital of Spain. Once upon a time it was rich and powerful, but unfortunately the period was architecturally debased. Still we must dree our weird ; it was written in the book of fate that we should go ; and we went.

We left Salamanca one afternoon, and about eleven at night reached our destination. This was a rare favour in Spain, where one has generally to spend the night in the train. The streets were in darkness and the hotel was closed, but a servant keeping vigil conducted us to rooms large, gorgeous and magnificent in comparison

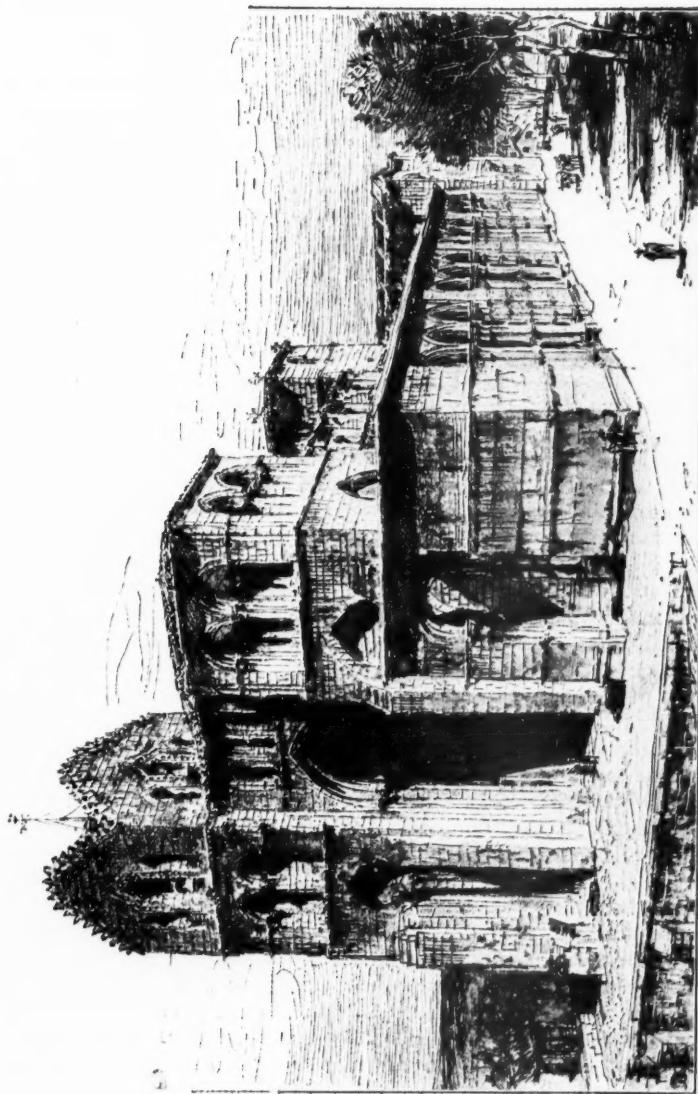
with what we had lately inhabited. We soon found the hotel many degrees better in all ways, kept by civilised French people who tried to combine the best of both countries in their management.

And we next discovered that Valladolid was even more disappointing than Salamanca. It is a town of much importance in the north of Spain, and there is a good deal of quiet movement about it, as though its people in their small way had much to do. The atmosphere is neither artistic nor one of "gilded leisure," but commercial and uninteresting. The streets are narrow and sometimes picturesque, but on the whole the prevailing tone is one of shabbiness. Not that the people are poor, but they are thrifty; and having no special eye for the beautiful are indifferent to the outward exterior. They labour for their money, and exercise a wise economy. But they are not altogether famous for civility, whilst the Post Office officials are without exception the rudest in all Spain. When we applied for our letters they demanded our passport. Neither cards nor "an honest look" nor fair words would satisfy them; and because we had no passports they refused to deliver. In vain we represented that never before had such a request been made. They replied with extreme insolence. We appealed as a last resource to our landlord, who thereupon accompanied us to the Post Office, and to whom they were equally uncivil: finally yielding to his elaborate and formally written guarantee. He told us that the insolence of these officials was proverbial and had much injured the town.

The old square, grand and imposing with its arcades, reminded us of Toledo and Salamanca, but it is older, more ancient and picturesque than the latter. This, too, is the favourite promenade of the people, and here every evening they congregate for the daily saunter, as important a function in the day's programme as dinner itself.

In this square in days gone by, all executions and bull-fights were held. Of the two exhibitions perhaps the former was the more merciful, least inhuman. Now they have built them a splendid bull-ring beyond the precincts, and here the people in summer pay their prices and take their savage pleasure.

In this square—for it dates so far back—Berenguela took the Crown of Castile from her head and resigned it in favour of her son Fernando III., otherwise St. Ferdinand King of Leon who immediately proceeded to prove his fitness to reign by conquering Cordova, Jaen and Seville. This took place before the whole assemblage of the people and all the Castilian nobles on July 1st, 1217. Here in 1415, the good Alvaro de Luna was beheaded by his false king, Juan II., whose forty-four years of reign were marked by not one personal act of dignity or greatness. Almost all that was worthy had been the work of Alvaro, who for thirty years out of those forty-four, had been Juan's wise councillor, ruling, restraining and controlling to the best of his power. Had he served his king less



CATHEDRAL, VALLADOLID.

faithfully, he might have lived the longer; but he died bravely, as one whose life has been devoted to good deeds. In this square Charles V., seated in majesty and state that recalled the days of Jewish pomp and grandeur, pardoned the Comuneros, whose chief seat of action had been our fair Segovia, and so finally put an end to the rebellion. And here his bigoted, cruel and narrow-minded son Philip II., in October 1559 held the first auto-da-fé. Thus the Plaza Major is interesting for many ancient and historical reasons. Out of all sympathy with this atmosphere are the small, modern, commonplace shops beneath the arcades, with every new element of form and fashion. Into these windows the Spanish women of to-day gaze with fatal fascination gradually perverting their taste, and presently discarding the beautiful for the hideous.

Ecclesiastically Valladolid is not favoured. Its cathedral was to have been built on a magnificent scale, but was never finished. It remains a mere colossal fragment, consisting simply of a nave and four bays with aisles and chapels. The nave is 250 feet long and 150 feet broad. According to the original plan it was to have been cruciform, with four lofty towers, rivalling the dimensions of Toledo. The whitewashed interior with red-tiled vaults is not impressive, but might easily be made so. The exterior is frightful with shapeless buttresses and solid blocks of masonry, and one turns from it as from a nightmare. It was begun by Philip II., who transferred his energies to the Escorial, and neglected Valladolid: and so it will probably remain. These are not the days for building great churches in Spain.

Not far from the Cathedral is a smaller but far more interesting church, that of Santa María la Antigua, with its beautiful steeple and open cloister running along the north wall. So far it reminded us of some of the lovely churches of Segovia. Santa María dates from the year 1180, the period when so much that is excellent in Spain came into existence. The cloister and lower part of the church are Norman, the arches of the former enriched with dog-tooth mouldings; but the east end is of later date, and though pure Gothic is less satisfactory. The interior is very fine, with its groined roof and round Norman columns, to each of which eight shafts are attached, a clerestory once lighted by lancet windows, and somewhat remarkable retablos. The fine steeple—Valladolid's greatest and most conspicuous ornament—rises three stages above the roof, each stage having arcaded windows with semicircular arches resting on slender, beautiful shafts. The low square spire or roof is covered with green and red pointed tiles, in the form of scallops, brilliant and dazzling in the sunlight. Other churches there are and many buildings, some of them of late Gothic and considerable merit, with a wealth of ornamentation, which must have taken endless time and patience to accomplish, all more or less characteristic of Spanish art, but at their best falling very far short of the pure simplicity of the early Gothic, and the matchless dignity of the Romanesque.

And it was not for all these things—for the College of San Gregorio, with its rich fifteenth century façade, for the church of San Pablo rebuilt about the same time by Torquemada the inquisitor, for the decorated church and monastery of San Benito; it was not for the house of Cervantes, where part of 'Don Quixote' was written, or the abode of Fabio Nelli the Mæcenas of Valladolid, with its Corinthian court and striking doorway; nor for the Casa del Sol, where dwelt and died the learned Gondomar, who was Philip III.'s Ambassador at the court of St. James; it was not for the striking and beautiful patios that enrich many a quiet street: not for all these various objects of more or less merit that we held our sojourn in Valladolid memorable. It was for our visit to Simancas, which lies seven miles out of the town, where most of the Spanish archives are deposited in an endless series of rooms.

The drive was not remarkable for any great interest, but once arrived, we were in a new world, and at the same time a very old and primitive world. In a moment we seemed to be carried back into the past centuries.

The wonderful little town lies on the brow of the hill overlooking the vast plains of Castile, with their splendid pine forests; plains which conjure up remote history. Here in 934 the Moors were defeated by King Ramiro, from which, however, they soon recovered. Five centuries later it defended the weak and miserable Enrique IV. against the League. And here in 1602, O'Donnel the Irish rebel fled after the



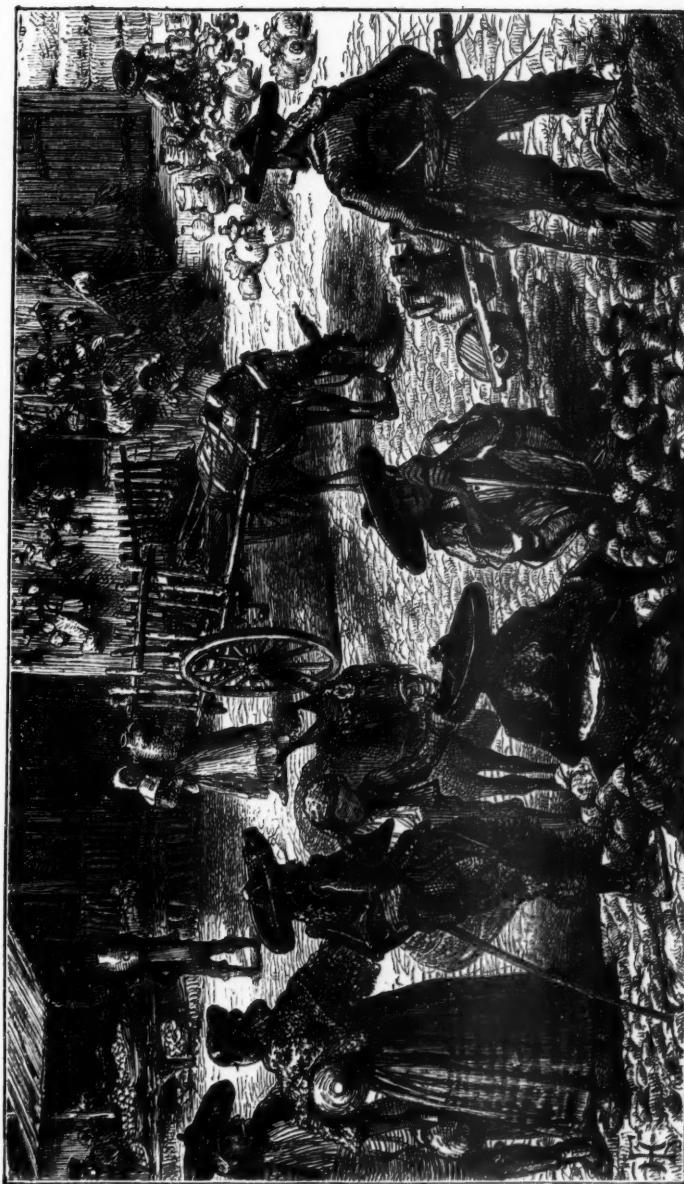
DOORWAY, SAN PABLO.

defeat of Kinsale and died. What Simancas is now in appearance, it might have been in those days. It is surrounded by its old walls, with their remarkable gateways. The streets are steep and narrow ; the whole place is wonderfully irregular. Everything appears to be going to wrack and ruin. There was a grey-brown tone over all, disturbed by no contrast. We saw no other place like it in Spain. Apparently it had fallen into a long, dreamless, enchanted slumber. The streets were quiet and deserted. Here and there a few women sat outside their doors, in the middle of the road, working with the needle. We passed through court-yards that might have been farm-yards, unpaved, inches thick in mud surrounded by walls with overhanging mediæval eaves. At every turning we came upon delightful old houses with dormer windows and wonderful roofs that apparently had never been touched for centuries.

This formed the charm of the place. It was a mixture of town and country ; an overgrown village ; a small dead world, melancholy to the last extent to live in, to the last degree interesting to visit. We had the place to ourselves. There was no one to interfere with us, or to take any notice. The few sewing women looked up calmly from their work, bade us "good-day," in subdued tones which seemed to say they had done with the world and had nothing left to hope for, and went on with their task.

At the base of the hill, below the walls of the town, ran the River Pisuerga, here crossed by a fine old bridge with seventeen arches ; and beyond lie the plains and the forests, whilst seven miles off to the left we catch sight of the misty atmosphere and church steeples of Valladolid. As many miles to the right, across that historic plain, there still rise the grey walls and roofs of the nunnery of Santa Clara, crowded with interest and romance, taking us back to the momentous days of Ferdinand and Isabella. Here in 1555, died their sad-fated daughter Mad Joan, at the age of seventy-six. She had been an insane captive for just upon half a century, first at the instigation of her father and then of her son Charles V. But it was a hard and cruel captivity. Her life was of the most melancholy order, her room a small dungeon without windows, into which the sunlight never penetrated, where she had no chance of recovering from her insanity. It has been said that she spent her life in watching her husband's coffin who was buried at Santa Clara, before being removed to Granada ; but this has been disproved—as far as anything can be disproved that happened 300 years ago. Her mental disturbance must have been deep-seated, for it descended to her children's children. Charles V. took a dislike to the world and died a monk at Yusti. His son Philip II. was even more deeply tainted, and buried himself in the Escorial, with all his gloomy thoughts, his religious superstition and his cruel bigotry. A century later it reappeared in Charles II. after whom the Bourbons came upon the scene.

But the great glory and attraction of Simancas is its wonderful,



VALLADOLID.

moated, mediæval castle, in which the archives of Spain repose : a splendid and imposing old fortress flanked by towers, its walls impregnable and time-defying. The moat is crossed by two old stone bridges. This great pile rises magnificently against the background of sky : one of those ancient castles absolutely surrounded by an atmosphere of romance and chivalry ; bearing witness to days when military tournaments only yielded to the sterner realities of the more earnest battle-field.

In a quiet nook near the castle lives the custodian ; a grey-headed old man who came forth with ponderous keys, and took us from room to room from floor to floor, with the greatest delight. He seemed to have every detail by heart, and took the greatest pride and intelligent interest in the various histories and records. Here he pointed out papers relating to the defeat of the Spanish Armada ; there the records of Christopher Columbus going forth to discover new worlds. With the great Elizabeth he seemed to have been personally acquainted, so intimate was he with her reign, whilst Napoleon and Wellington he looked upon as mere heroes of a commonplace yesterday. He overwhelmed us with details and descriptions, and we listened and examined only too willingly.

We found ourselves steeped in a past world. Scene after scene rose vividly before us ; deeds and records affecting the whole universe and all time ; landing us now in Egypt, now in Africa, now on the burning plains of India, now in the most romantic days of Spain : days of the Romans, the Visigoths, the Moors ; of the Kings of Castile and Asturias ; days when all the sad but romantic records of the Conquest of Granada, the defeat of Boabdil, the loss of the Alhambra were events of an hour.

The documents, co-existent with all these events, brought us face to face with them, and the flying moments were golden. The countless papers were closely packed in forty-six rooms, and a more romantic stronghold for them could not exist. The castle in bygone ages belonged to the Admirals of Castile, but was bought by the Kings of Spain, and Cardinal Ximenes was seized with the happy idea of turning it into a repository for the national archives : whilst Diego de Ayala, Charles V.'s secretary organised the whole matter. It has occasionally been proposed to remove the archives to the Escorial, but it would be sad indeed to rob Simancas of so much of its interest.

The castle itself with its massive walls, countless rooms, arched ceilings, staircases and corridors, ancient windows looking into silent courtyards and picturesque turrets commanding the vast plains, is full of a strange, indescribable atmosphere, and we felt ourselves lost amidst the shadows of the past. Few places had interested us more, but it was an interest essentially distinct from any other. As our footsteps echoed through the vast spaces of the silent and deserted rooms, every nook and corner seemed crowded with ghosts, and in

the presence of these endless records of the flight of time we felt that we indeed were ourselves but shadows. On every post and lintel, over every doorway the words seemed written in letters of fire : **TO-DAY WE VISIT THE TOMBS OF OUR FRIENDS, TO-MORROW OTHER FRIENDS VISIT OURS.**

We made the most of our golden moments in this old and wonderful castle ; the sun declined and still we lingered. And once again there seemed to ring through all these silent rooms, more emphatically than we had ever heard it before, in clear distinct tones from which we could not escape, which haunted us for long after, and haunt us now as the picture rises before us in all its beauty and all its charm : "Here, verily and indeed, dwells the romance, the true and undying, the inexhaustible and matchless ROMANCE OF SPAIN !"



OMNIA VINCIT AMOR.

DOST thou ask what love is ? love is bliss and woe ;

Gentle as a dove is, timid as a doe ;

Jealous as a tigress fighting for her young,

Braver than a lion when the foe has sprung.

Love is like a fire-fly, with its living spark

Shining ever brighter when the way is dark ;

Love is like a rose-bud, full of hidden sweets,

Fragrant in the woodlands or the weary streets.

Love is like a river ceasing not to run,

Though the stones be rugged and the banks be dun.

Love will smooth the furrows hand of pain doth trace,

Love will soothe the sadness on the dear one's face.

Love is like the radiance of a distant star,

For we see it beaming through the years afar ;

Still we see it gleaming, knowing not eclipse,

Though the bloom is paling on the nectared lips.

Love is like a sunbeam, lighting with its gold

Faces fair or faded, tresses young or old.

When the youthful roses wither from the cheek,

Love will kiss the pallor on the brow so meek.

Dost thou ask if love is something doomed to die,

Like the opal rainbow in the summer sky ?

Only death can tell thee, but this heart of mine

Deemeth that immortal which is half divine !

ALICE MACKAY.

HERMITAGE WHARF.



WHEN I was a girl my father, who was a ship's broker, lived in a far more romantic house than the pretty country rectory in which I am writing this.

Our house was one of five or six which formed a small terrace, overlooking a little flagged wharf. Trees grew before the houses, and from the windows my sisters and I watched the ships drop down the river, and the quaint barges and rafts go by. No wheels ever broke the stillness with their rumbling. We were divided by a draw-bridge from the nearest road, and that was not a thoroughfare. Sometimes waggons brought up merchandise to be transferred to the barges lying under the wharf, but we hardly heard their wheels.

The wharf was our promenade, and we were as solitary and far safer there than I have ever felt at any of the watering-places I have visited since those days. All round us was the bustle and hurry of the docks, but we were on an island of calm. Not always, though. How the wind used to howl up the reach of the river! I have felt the house rock, and the trees strain and groan in the wind as I never heard any other trees do. And how wonderful it was to look out in the night, and see the dark ships looming, and a light twinkling across the river, and to think of all the ships that lay waiting to sail, some never to come home again; and of all the ships that were sailing hither, over all the seas of the world, watched for from many a window whose light shone out over the water, and prayed for in distant inland homes.

These thoughts, intensified by a terrible storm which happened when I was a child, so impressed me, that I added of my own accord this petition to my prayers, "Pray God bless all the ships at sea, and bring them safe home."

Besides the houses in the terrace—Hermitage Terrace—there was another house, quite at the end of the wharf, with a window over-

hanging the river. In a smaller town it would have been called the harbour-master's house. I believe the man who lived there was a sort of clerk of the wharf—he superintended all the lading and unlading which went on there. He had been several voyages in his youth, but had been disabled when on a whaling expedition. The little house had a very nautical air. A large chart hung in the parlour, and there were two stuffed peregrines in a glass case in the bow-window, and a great many curious shells and specimens of coral set out to the best advantage on every available inch of space. I think it was this economy of space which gave the house so maritime an appearance. What with cunning little cupboards fitting into corners, and shelves in unexpected places, and queer contrivances in the way of pegs, the room was like the cabin of a ship—only that no cabin ever contained half so many things.

I do not know when my friendship with Dan Stockbridge began. I must have been a very little girl when I first sat at his daughter Caroline's feet, listening to the wonderful stories he had to tell of icebergs, whales, hurricanes, fires at sea, and such-like. Caroline must have been quite a young woman then, though to me she seemed so old that, when I myself was a woman, I was amazed to find her hair still brown and her face unwrinkled. I suppose she was a little over forty when she told me the story I am going to tell you. She was a comely woman with brown eyes and a colour in her cheeks, and a quiet manner, cheerful in spite of, perhaps rather by reason of its quietness. Sick people liked Caroline Stockbridge to nurse them—once she nursed me through some childish illness, and I have never forgotten the comfort her very presence gave me, and how cool her hand always was—so different from our housemaid's, which were hot damp hands, and knocked down everything they touched.

I was not a child when Caroline told me her story. I was a young woman, and I was engaged to your father. It was on the last day of the old year—what an old year it seems now!—that she told me. I had had a quarrel with your father—never mind what about—it was our first quarrel, and our last; and it was all my fault. Your father was curate in the next parish to ours, and lived with his mother and sister; and we—my sisters and I—had been invited to tea. Papa was busy, and could not go, but he was to come to supper. We had arranged weeks before to see the old year out together, but the very last day but one of the year we fell out, and I said I would not go to his house, nor speak to him till he took back something he had said. He said he would not—what he had said was true, and he would not take it back. So we parted in anger.

I was too angry to cry that night, but made up for it by crying my eyes out the next morning; and, after our early dinner, I could bear myself no longer, so I put on my shawl, and ran across to Caroline, telling my sisters, who knew something was wrong, not to wait for me. It was a bitter day, inclined to snow. The sky was almost black, and

the twilight seemed to have begun at three o'clock. But Caroline saw that my eyes were red ; and, though she said nothing, I knew that she saw. She sat knitting by the fire. There was no other light in the room, but I could see everything in it plainly, as the fire glowed and sparkled into every corner. I looked out through the still unshuttered window, and felt the cold chill my very heart. "How dreary the twilight is on the river," I said, when I had listened to the clic-clac of Caroline's needles till I thought I should scream.

"Are you not going to Mrs. Webster's this evening?" said Caroline, without looking up from her knitting.

"No," I said, shortly.

There was a pause. Caroline's needles clicked, quickly, then slowly, then quickly again, then stopped.

"Miss Esther, I've known you ever since you were as high as my knee, and I know you won't think what I'm going to say is a liberty. Is anything wrong between you and Mr. Webster?"

"Mr. Webster and I have differed about something," said I, haughtily enough, I don't doubt. A minute before, I had felt so miserable, that I was more than half inclined to put my head on Caroline's knees and sob out the confession of my misery ; but this was no more than the longing for sympathy which in most of us contends so powerfully with the lower and more animal instinct of secrecy. I was by no means penitent—indeed I considered myself sorely aggrieved ; and the relief of having spoken to someone on the subject, though it was but a word, was sufficient to bring all my anger to the surface again. I said to myself that I did not feel at all miserable, but that I was very angry, and had a right to be angry.

"This is the last day of the old year, Miss Esther," said Caroline, presently, in those quiet tones of hers, which always made me feel soothed and reasonable in spite of myself. "They say it's unlucky for friends to let the year go out in anger."

"Oh, I am not angry," said I, very angrily. "I don't care to go to Mrs. Webster's to tea to-night, that's all."

Caroline said nothing ; and presently, I, tired of looking out into the dreary twilight, and feeling the keen wind steal in at the cracks and crannies of the old window, came and sat on a low stool by the large old-fashioned fender—it was brass, and Caroline kept it as bright as gold. To this day the sight of a brass fender recalls that evening as vividly as though it were only yesterday. Caroline's old black cat got up from the rug, and, after a preliminary investigation of the premises, deliberately jumped up on my lap and curled herself round.

"Poor old pussie," said I, "you don't think me spiteful, do you?" A sudden clatter of the doors and windows made me start. I was in a highly-wrought state, and could scarcely sit still a moment together. "What a stormy night it's going to be," I said. Caroline made no reply. "My sisters will have started by now ; I'll stay and

have tea with you, if you'll let me, Caroline, and fancy I'm a little girl again." Oh, dear! I'm sure I could not have cried just then, to save my life; but I had a lump in my throat which almost choked me. Caroline's silence irritated me—I was determined to make her speak.

"How old is Spot, Caroline?"

"Past fifteen year old, Miss Esther."

"That's very old for a cat: you'll miss her when she dies, poor old pussie."

"I've had her ever since she was a little kitten. Did I ever tell you, Miss Esther, who gave her to me?"

"No," said I. Everyone knew that Caroline Stockbridge had had a love-affair in her youth, and that she had refused several good offers since. Hermitage Wharf was like any rural village in respect of gossip: but no one knew more than these bare facts.

"She was given me by a friend that I parted from in anger one New Year's Eve," said Caroline, laying down her knitting and looking into the fire. "I never told my own father all about it, but I think I'll tell you, Miss Esther, if you care to hear."

"I should like to hear very much, if it won't hurt you to tell it," said I, all the excitement and passion dying out of my heart as I spoke. Caroline's voice had in it something which people nowadays call mesmeric power—she could make one feel what she meant, without saying it.

"It doesn't hurt me, Miss Esther," she said, with a curious smile. She never shed a tear, and her voice never faltered all through her story; she spoke in a dreamy, inward voice, as though she were speaking more to herself than to me, and she seemed to speak not of herself, but of someone whom she had once known, as she told me her life-story.

I was only twelve years old when mother died, she began, and there were five of us, two younger than I, and two older. I was the eldest girl, and I kept house for father, and did the best I could for the little ones. Both my brothers went to sea, and my sister next to me went to service. I never left home at first, because father couldn't spare me; and then, as my sisters grew up, I was engaged to Will Garland. He was a second cousin of ours, on father's side, and when I was first engaged to him he was only just out of his time; but he was very steady, and a good seaman, and when he went his last voyage he was mate of the ship he sailed in, and had a share in her. He'd had a little money left him too, and he had laid by a little more, and he looked forward to buying her, for her captain, who was her owner, had no children, and was talking of selling her and giving up the sea.

Will was as good-tempered a man as you could wish to see; but when he was offended he was a good while coming round. He wasn't quick to take offence, but when he did he was a little obstinate. He'd never scold, but just look grave.

Well, we'd been keeping company near upon four years when he went his last voyage, and we were reckoning on being married when he came back. The brig was the *Flying Dutchman*, an unlucky name, I always used to think, for I'd read a dreadful tale in a book about a ship by that name. But Will always laughed at me, and said there was nothing unlucky but bad seamanship.

Well, it was the beginning of December, and the *Flying Dutchman* was to sail on the 5th or 6th to St. John's, Newfoundland, where she was bound for that voyage. When he was on shore Will lived with a married sister in one of the little streets that run down to the river, between here and Poplar. He used to come to see me, or I go there, most evenings, when he was at home.

It was one afternoon, about this time—but that was a very hard winter, and the snow was on the ground. I had been out for something, and as I passed the end of Bermuda Street, I thought I'd just look in and ask Sarah, that was Will's sister, how she did. I daresay I thought too that I might catch a sight of Will. So I turned down the street, and the door was not fastened, so I went in without knocking. I heard a sound like someone crying in the parlour, and I stopped for a minute, and before I knew anything I heard Will's voice saying, "There, there, my girl, trust me, and don't fret."

I didn't know I was jealous till that minute; but when I heard Will speaking so kind to someone else, a sort of madness took me, and it was like a fire in my head—just like when I had a fever once. Before I could think, I'd flung open the door. There was Will, with a girl beside him, and he had hold of her hand, and one hand on her shoulder. I didn't say a word, but just stood and looked at them, and I could hear my breath coming and going in great gasps, and I listened to it quite stupid-like, and stared at them. Even then I wondered to see Will look so cool, but it only enraged me more. The girl was crying so bitterly, with her head on Will's shoulder, that she hadn't heard me come in; and when Will spoke, she gave a scream, and took away her arms, and stared at me, half-dazed.

"Caroline," says Will, "I never thought to see such a look as that on your face. Why, my dear, do you doubt me? This is my cousin Fanny that I've often spoken to you of."

Then I broke out. "Cousin Fanny, indeed!" says I. "You may deceive me once, Will Garland, but no one shall deceive me twice. *Cousin Fanny*, I wish you a very good evening!" and I walked straight out of the house, and home. It was snowing fast, but I never knew it till I got home, and my youngest sister cried out, "Why, Carrie, you look like old Father Christmas!" I laughed, and shook the snow off my cloak, and got father's tea, and talked and laughed, till father said, "One may know Will's coming to-night only by looking at Carrie's cheeks."

I felt half-mad. One minute I vowed I'd never set eyes on Will again, and the next I was ready to beg his pardon on my bended

knees. His honest face kept rising up before me, and seeming to say over and over, "My dear, do you doubt me?" But he *was* kissing and hugging the girl, and she was a pretty girl—I'd had time to see that. I couldn't make up my mind what I would do. Well, I waited and waited, and I couldn't help listening for Will's footstep—it always sounded so plain over the flags, but the snow was falling fast, and though everything was so still, I did not hear his step till he was at the door. He looked grave, but father had something to tell him about some business they had together, and didn't notice his manner. I sat just here, by the fire, in this very old chair; I had my work; but every now and then I looked at Will. Once he turned, and our eyes met, and just then I remembered how Will had said once he liked blue eyes; and Fanny's were blue—I'd seen that—very pretty eyes they were, though she was crying. And I felt my anger come back worse than ever, almost, and I got up and went away upstairs, and stayed there till I heard father calling out to me to come and bid Will good-night. My heart jumped into my mouth. He wasn't going to stay to supper, then! He wanted to get back to Fanny, no doubt. I would not have gone down, but father stood at the bottom of the stairs, calling to me, and I couldn't tell him why I didn't want to come. So I came down, and father says:

"Well, if you really can't stay and have a bite with us, I'll leave you two young folks to say good-night to each other without me to help you."

Will was standing by the table when I came in, and neither of us spoke for a minute or two. Then Will said: "Won't you even bid me good-night, Carrie?"

"Certainly, Mr. Garland," says I. "I wish you a very good-night, and a very pleasant supper!"

"Oh, Carrie, Carrie, I didn't think you were that jealous," says Will. "I came here to-night to tell you all about poor Fanny, and ask you to be kind to her, but I can't tell you when you're like this."

"Of course not," says I. "I'm not good enough even to hear her name."

"Carrie," says Will, taking fire, "if you can be obstinate, so can I. I was going to explain it all, but now I won't speak a word to clear myself. If you can believe any harm of me or Fanny, you may, for me!"

"You or Fanny!" says I.

"Yes," says Will. "Me or Fanny. We are neither of us to blame; and if you wasn't so mad with jealousy you could have seen for yourself we wasn't. Why, Carrie, Fanny is like my own sister, and she's engaged."

"A likely story!" says I. "I wonder what the young man would say, if he knew what I know."

Will turned angry at that. "He's welcome to know; and I hope,

for Fanny's sake, he'd not see harm where no harm was," says he. "I never thought you'd use me so, Carrie—I never thought you could look as you looked to-night."

"It's a good thing you've found it out in time," says I. "And I never thought—"

"Stop, Carrie!" says Will very quick. "Don't go to say what you'll be sorry for afterwards!"

"Oh, Mr. Garland," says I, "I'm not afraid of losing you, if that's what you mean. You're not the only man who ever spoke civil to me, if you come to that."

I think I was mad. I was longing all the time to beg his pardon, but something made me go on saying these wicked things to him—it seemed to me as though I said them more to hurt myself than him. Will stood looking at me so distressed that I could hardly bear it, but I wouldn't give in yet. So I says, "Don't let me detain you, Mr. Garland; I daresay you want to be going. Fanny wouldn't use you so, nor look so, I daresay."

"I'll go, if you wish it," says Will. "Perhaps it would be better. Good-night, Carrie."

I was mad to think he could go like that, and his ship sailing in three days!

"Good-night," says I. "And Good-bye, too. It's a pity you should waste any more of your time coming in to say Good-bye."

Will was just in the doorway; and he stopped and turned when I said that.

"Carrie! Is this really you, Carrie? My Carrie? And could you let me go like this?"

"Oh, yes," says I—though I could have bitten my tongue out while I was saying the words. "Oh, yes, quite easy, Mr. Garland, and I daresay I shouldn't break my heart if I never saw your face again!"

"Do you mean that?" says Will. "Say that twice, Carrie, and you shall never get the chance to say it the third time."

I don't know whether I should have said those cruel, false words again, or whether I should have given in, and begged Will's forgiveness; I was in that way when a straw will turn you; but just then I heard father's footstep, and I turned without another word and ran upstairs to bed. I heard father say good-night to Will, and ask him why he didn't have his say out in the warm parlour instead of letting all the cold air into the house, and giving me my death of cold standing at the door, and I heard Will say good-night, and his footsteps getting fainter as he trod down the frozen snow, and I heard my sister come in—she had been round to a friend's, just to leave me alone with Will—and I knew she'd be surprised to find Will gone before supper.

"Oh, Caroline," said I, as Caroline sat silently looking into the fire,

"I wonder if you felt as——" and then I stopped, with my face on fire and a choking in my throat.

I don't think I did feel, Miss Esther, and that was the worst of the misery. I thought I'd give all I had for a good cry, and yet not a tear came, and I wasn't what people mostly call unhappy. I was stupefied, I think. I went down and helped my sister get supper, and when father said, "Carrie, there's something gone cross betwixt you and Will Garland, or my name ain't Jacob Stockbridge," I laughed and said we'd had a few words about something, and Will had gone off in a bit of a huff. "You'd best make it up as soon as you can, then," says father, "for I just looked in at the *Cape of Good Hope*, and Ned Parker was in there, and he says the *Flying Dutchman's* to sail tomorrow night; the orders come this afternoon."

My heart was in my mouth, and I gave a little jump, and father says: "What, are you going to-night?" Father always would have his joke, and what with him laughing at me, and me still very angry with Will, I says: "Oh, if he wants to make it up, he must come to me, I'm not going to him," though it wasn't so late or so far but that I might have gone that very night.

I don't think I had a wink of sleep that night. All the next morning I stayed in, expecting Will every minute. I'd made up my mind to forgive him, but when it got to be noon and he hadn't come, I was that restless I could not keep still a minute. I was determined I would not go to him. It was his place, not mine, I said to myself. But when father came in to dinner, he says to me: "Carrie, my girl, if you don't mean to split with Will for good and all, take my advice and pop on your bonnet and shawl after dinner, and go round and say good-bye. I met him down by the dock this morning, and I asked him what was up that he was in the sulks and you like a ghost, and he says, as high as you please, 'Your daughter, Mr. Stockbridge, says she don't ever want to see my face again, and I'm not the man to force myself on any woman.'" Would you believe it, Miss Esther? I was pleased; that showed he was hurt, and his being hurt showed he cared about me. I made sure he would come now father had told him what I'd said about that he must come to me; he'd be sure to come, and I was glad that I hadn't gone round to Sarah's, as I had had a mind to twenty times if I had once, in the morning. I waited and waited till it was getting dark. I thought he wanted to frighten me, but I never doubted he'd come.

We'd had tea, and I'd gone to the door twice, thinking I heard Will's knock, but he never came. At last, at about seven o'clock I could bear myself no longer, and I put on my things and went round to Sarah's.

She was sitting at work in the parlour when I got there. "Where's Will?" says I, in a minute or two.

"Why, don't you know?" says she. "Hasn't he said good-bye to you?"

The room swam round with me. Sarah ran and caught me, or I should have fallen on the floor.

"What on earth's the matter, Carrie?" says she. "Do you feel faint?"

"Tell me about Will," I said, when I could speak.

"Why," says Sarah, "the ship sails to-night. Will said good-bye to us when he went back to the dock after dinner; but he said he'd come up for a minute if so be as he could be spared, but he didn't think he could. The ship sails at the turn o' tide."

"And that's at seven to-night, and it's past seven," said I, bursting out crying.

"Now don't take on so, Carrie, don't," says Sarah. "Maybe he'll come yet, and anyway, he'll be back in three months."

"Oh, Sarah," says I, "we parted in anger, and I never said good-bye."

"Well, now, I thought Will was uncommon down-hearted when he went away," says Sarah. "Dear, dear! But Will never was one to bear malice long—he'll be as sorry as sorry long before he comes home—don't take on so."

I would have gone to the dock, though Sarah said we could never get aboard his ship in all the confusion; but there was the chance of his coming up home, and we didn't know which way he might come, and between the fear of missing him, and Sarah saying they would never let us on the ship at the last moment, and the dreadful fear I had that perhaps Will would not speak to me if I did go, I sat there, crying, and listening to every step that went by, till it was so late I had to go home. But before I went, Sarah told me all about Fanny. She was Will's cousin, and more like a sister, for they had been brought up together; and Sarah told me how she was engaged to a young man who wasn't very steady; and she'd had words with him about something, and he'd gone and 'listed, and Fanny had come to beg Will to lend her the money to buy his discharge.

"Poor Fan, she was near out of her mind," says Sarah, "for the regiment's just ordered to India. Yes, and she went and paid it in this morning. He's promised he'll never touch another drop if she'll marry him, and I hope he'll settle down. I think this'll be a lesson to him. He ain't a bad sort," says Sarah. "He's a good workman at his trade, and there's no harm in him, except that the leastest drop gets in his head."

Sarah never knew what Will and me had quarrelled about. Fanny thought Will could make it all right with me in a minute, and Will thought so too, but he made her promise not to tell Sarah, because Sarah talked.

Fanny told me all this afterwards; that night, I listened to Sarah telling me about her and Will, till it seemed to me that the clock ticked so loud I couldn't hear what she said. Then the clock struck eight, and I jumped up. "Sarah," says I, "I must go down to the

dock, and try to see Will, to say good-bye. Will you come with me?"

Sarah said all she could, but I was determined, so she put on her shawl, and we set off. Sarah was a kind-hearted girl, but I couldn't tell her anything about it, only that Will and me had quarrelled, and I must see him.

Well, everything went wrong that night. We were going along a street, when there was a cry of "fire," and in a minute the people came crowding, and Sarah and me were wedged in so as we couldn't move; and Sarah turned faint, and if it hadn't been for a man, who helped us, and got her into a chemist's, I don't know what would have become of us. Then when she got better, I said I'd go on alone, and I had to go a long way round; and when I got down to the wharf, where the ship sailed from, it was half-past nine, and they told me the *Flying Dutchman* had weighed anchor two hours ago, and was dropping down the river with that night's ebb-tide; and the man said the wind and tide were both with her, and she'd be off Gravesend by then. The walk I had home after that was the weariest walk I ever had in my life. All sorts of wicked thoughts came into my head as I stood on the wharf. I think the man who had spoken to me thought all wasn't right, for he says, "Young woman, you take my advice and go home. The ship's far enough by this time, and whistling won't bring her back, nor cryin' neither. You jest go home, and I want to lock the gate, and go home myself."

I went then, and walked sometimes quick and sometimes slow, and once or twice I sat down on a doorstep, and thought I'd never go home, but go to one of the places I knew of, where you could jump into the river and no one know, and let the river take me down, and perhaps Will would be standing on deck and see my face in the water, and be sorry—that was all I seemed to want, for Will to be sorry. Then I remembered hearing some one say, drowned folks didn't float for three days, that would be too late for Will to see me. You think this sounds like foolish talk, Miss Esther, but that's what I thought. At last I got home, and crawled up to bed, and didn't get out of it for a week. I was a little off my head part of the time, and they said I moaned, and called for Will, and every now and then I'd jump up in bed, and say, "It wouldn't break my heart if I never saw your face again!" and then I'd begin moaning, and crying for Will.

But I was always strong and healthy, and by Christmas-day I was well enough to make the pudding, and help sister put up the mistletoe. What a mockery it seemed! but then father and sister liked it, and on Christmas morning I went to church, and the parson preached about peace and good-will, and forgiving each other, and I forgave Will, and prayed God that night to let Will forgive me, for it was all my fault.

I was so much happier when I could think kindly of Will, though there were times when I wondered if he would come to see me when he came home, and then I'd feel angry again, and say to myself that I'd never be the first to make it up, it was the man's place, not the woman's.

Caroline turned her head a little away, and looked straight into the fire, and did not speak for so long, that at last I said, very softly :

"Did Will come back?"

It was New Year's Eve, said Caroline, in a low solemn voice. And the wind was getting up, and howling among the trees and the chimneys, and there was thick yellow foam on the landing-steps. I went out on an errand in the afternoon, and the wind was so strong I could hardly walk against it. It was just dark when I got back, and the door was open, and try as I would I couldn't shut it, the wind took it out of my hand, and I was rather weak from having been ill. I wondered to find it open, because I knew I had shut it when I went out. I called "father!" but no one answered. Then something made me leave the door, and come in here. The fire was piled up high, and I could see everything in the room quite plain by the firelight. In this very chair I'm sitting in now, was a man—a sailor—his head was turned away, but the minute I came in I knew who it was. "Will!" says I, "Will!"

He never looked round, but put out his hands as a sign I shouldn't come nearer. I don't know what I thought—I didn't think anything—except that it was Will; but as he waved me off, I dropped down on that chair by the door, and there I sat.

Then, how I don't know, I began to talk, and I told Will everything—how angry I'd been at first, how I knew that he was true—how sorry and penitent I was—and above all, how I repented those wicked, wicked, false words I'd said. "Oh, Will," I said, "I've never known a happy moment since! and I'd give anything to see your dear face once more, and hear you say you forgive me. Oh, Will, let me see your face, don't turn away like that. Will, you are breaking my heart! Let me see your face, Will, and speak one word to me, for pity's sake!"

At that he got up from the chair, and then I saw he was dripping-wet—the firelight showed everything so plain. And then I saw some change I had not noticed while I was talking—I don't know what it was, but I grew cold, and I couldn't breathe or stir. Then he turned slowly.

I can't tell you much, Miss Esther; my eyes froze in my head, and I only saw a white face, and Will's dark eyes—but I knew that it was not the face of a living man. He seemed to gather up something, and he came towards the door—it was like an icy wind in the room—and as he passed me, he stooped, and I felt an ice-cold wind

on my cheek, and I fancied I heard Will's voice say, in a sort of sigh, "My Carrie," but I don't know. I fell down in a swoon, and father came in an hour after, and found the door open, and me in a faint on the parlour-floor, and the fire was out, though the coals wasn't burnt. When I came-to, father was saying the house was as cold as death.

"Yes," I said, "death has been here."

Then I told father that Will was drowned, but that he had forgiven me. Father and sister put me to bed, and tried to make me think I'd fallen asleep and dreamed it all. But I knew better than that. I wasn't ill, though they all thought I should be. I was very weak all that winter, but not what you could call ill—only the cheek Will had kissed always felt cold.

I didn't tell Sarah and her husband at first, but when the ship began to be over-due, and no tidings, I told her Will would never come home.

"And did you never hear of the ship?" I asked, after a long silence.

"No," said Caroline. "She was never heard of any more."

"But I have not been unhappy," said Caroline, presently. "Will forgave me, and he knew I was sorry."

I sat a little while longer, till I heard old Stockbridge coming in, and then I kissed Caroline and thanked her; and I went home, and put on my violet silk dress with the red ribbons, and went off to Mrs. Webster's. They were in the middle of tea when I came in, and my sisters looked astonished to see me, but I only said, "I'm sorry to be so late," and no one took any more notice. After tea, your father and I were alone for a minute, and he looked at me, and said, "Thank you for coming," and I put my hand in his; and so we made up the only quarrel we ever had. But I think my quarrel would never have been made up, if Caroline Stockbridge had not told me how she made up hers.



REFLECTIONS OF A BATH MIRROR.

By C. J. LANGSTON.

I AM an old mirror. I have an old history. I have seen strange things that would shock Nineteenth Century Propriety and make Dame Grundy's hair stand on end: for we did not stick at trifles, and I have heard Mary Berry call a spade a spade when I was young.

Only fancy, my dear—when I was young and bright-looking folks did not have five o'clock tea and turn out, nor half-a-dozen wines at dinner; and yet I can even now see old Sam Johnson smack his lips over his sixteenth cup, when he was abusing Mrs. Thrale for adorning her hair like a cockatoo for a fancy ball. And Pitt, the great commoner, who came in his sedan from the Circus, once declared to Henry Ellison in this very room that the potent twin-brethren, port and claret, were all a man needed to digest his dinner: so that we were a sociable people one hundred years ago. There now! I have let out my age; I who would conceal it as studiously as Lady Morgan, or my earlier visitor, the Duchess of Rutland, whose face was all enamel, and who dare not enter a damp room for fear it should swell and crack. Never mind; a mirror, like a man, is no older than it feels, and I feel positively juvenile this Christmas. I look young too.

What's that you say about a strong line across the forehead, my frame slightly warped, and an ugly crow's foot in the corner of the —? Tut tut, my dear; it's all my eye and Elizabeth Martin. The line you speak of was all the fashion, like patches, when George the Third was King. Ask my old acquaintance Beauchamp, second Marquis of Hertford—that is, if he does not mind being disturbed from seventy years' sleep in Arrow Church—whether this line was not apparent in every oblong mirror when he refurnished Ragley for the Regent.

That my frame is a little bent from trying to hear the inward speech of a de-generation born with a silver spoon in its mouth, I must admit. Not that I am deaf—oh, dear no! for I can hear the Abbey bells ring out the old year as clearly as I could when they shouted for joy at the birth of the nineteenth century. As to the crow's foot in the corner of the eye, that was not from the brush of old Father Time, but another kind of brush, my dear, which suggests a click near the handle, a flash of fire, and the whirl of a bullet.

It is an ugly scar, but then it is an ugly story; and when I think that the hot blood, the wild daring, the headstrong and heartstrong passion that then spun round the wheels of life, are only now a little

brown dust in obscure graves, I cannot help feeling that beauty and love are but like the mist on the mirror—a mere breath: the advancing sun flashes across the whirligig of time, and they are all gone.

I was admired, I can tell you, when first I entered the double doors of No. 1, Royal Crescent, one hundred and eleven years ago this very Christmas. Everyone—that is, everyone worth knowing in Bath—came to see me. Oh, the beautiful ladies with hair rolled back, and pearl powder and patches (one, Lady Yarde, I think, had her husband's coach and six stuck on her forehead), who looked into my bright face, and went away better pleased with their own. The gentlemen, too, with their periwigs and great white neckcloths, their claret-coloured coats and embroidered waistcoats, and such calves! Ah me! they never dress now but in funeral suits, and legs have dwindled to broomsticks. Ask Sir Fanny who lived in Milsom Street: yet, I forget, somebody said he was dead. What! can the immortal Fanny, the exotic of Bath society, the hero of so many Assembly Room cabals, pop from his perch and I be oblivious? No, surely! for it was only a hundred years ago that he accepted an invitation to dinner here. "Not later than twelve," I heard him lisp to the chairmen, "and bring two fellows with the links to walk each side, for — I was cleared out t'other morning when being carried along Brock Street."

Well! how he flirted with Mrs. Sturmers, and nothing in the woman after all but her vixenish tongue: yet stay, I must introduce other local celebrities. There was old Jerningham, the poet, babbling his own verses, but no match for Mrs. Thrale—the little, excitable lady in stiff brocade, whose "Three Warnings" so touched burly William Sheldon, then seventy-eight, that he slapped his neighbour's knee and bawled, "Egad, I've got 'em." Andrew Barkley, who brought his fiddle—his *base vile* as the bright-eyed Countess D'Alton maliciously whispered to Granado Pigott; but her gay cavalier, as all the world knows, was young Sir Patrick Houston, connected, my child, with that strange affair at the Duchess of Dorset's: but mum, we never tell, or Bath society would not hold together. There was Sir Walts Horton, too, with a voice like a guinea fowl, so devoted to whist that he never spoke "but by the card," and the persuasive Helena Lady Dunkirk, who had set the fashion of a stand-up supper, after quinz and quadrille-coqueting with clever Henry Harington. Captain Vaux was there, all smiles and graciousness, with his rival Harry Harcourt. These last two gentlemen were singularly alike in figure and in feature, save that Harcourt allowed his whiskers to grow, an unusual thing in those days.

All were duly announced at the drawing-room door by a powdered footman, full six feet high in his silk stockings.

What a rarely beautiful drawing-room it is—at least so says my twin-brother. Quite forty feet by eighteen, and lofty; the panelled walls of scarlet and gold; the elegant cornices with the delicate acanthus

in bold relief ; the marble chimneypiece of the purest white that Italy could furnish with its carved cornucopiae of ferns and flowers, and that cherubic face ever smiling a welcome in the centre. Truly Wood the architect knew how to design reception-rooms in the Royal Crescent.

This house had just been bought by our host for a very reasonable sum. Owing to its sad connection with the recent fatal duel between Viscount Du Barré and Count Rice it was said to be haunted. I myself have heard the clash of swords and a loud shriek, passing into a prolonged moan, in the early morning. You may say what you like ; but the startled and severed soul does come in search of its old tenement the body, sometimes : or what made Madame Girard (the cause of that fatal pistol shot) start back with affright, when in front of me, and cry out that Du Barré was looking over her shoulder, and that she could bear the house no longer.

Mrs. Sarah Warner came to look at it ; but she was superstitious, and the letting fell through. Then the agent brought Mr. Gladell Vernon, a middle-aged gentleman, into the room, who peered into my face exclaiming, "This is included in the fixtures, I suppose" ; and a week later he took possession, and gave what he called a house-warming.

You will excuse a vain old body being garrulous, but what I have to tell is worth hearing, my dear.

"Now, Mr. Vernon," said the hostess, "will you lead my Lady Dunkirk into the dining-room ?"

The guests followed in pairs, the last but one being Mr. Harcourt and a young lady dressed in the height of fashion, whose little feet were encased in the loveliest pair of red-heeled shoes you ever saw.

I was deeply interested in these two, for never was a maiden wooed and won under such strange circumstances, as all Bath will tell you, at least if they have not caught cold from remaining so long in those damp vaults beneath the Abbey Church.

The young lady was Frances Nepean, Mr. Vernon's niece—a catch and no mistake ; for everyone said that when her godfather, Mr. Bodman, an Indian nabob, died (and his liver and digestion were of the worst), she would be worth a plum.

Now, Mr. Vernon had set his heart upon Captain Vaux carrying off the prize ; and certainly his manners were most winning. In fact the ladies called him killing, and he was so in another sense, for he often boasted that in more than one *affaire de cœur* he had left his rival dead on the field.

Yet, such is the strange perversity of your sex, that Frances Nepean took no pains to conceal a preference for her less taking suitor, and was just now laughing and talking to Harry Harcourt as if that were the most proper as well as the most natural thing in the world.

Table decorations, did you say ? There were none in those days save on the Christmas pudding. No menu cards, no flowers, no

mitred napkins; dinner was a serious matter, not to be associated with trifles. Neither had English dishes taken French names, nor English hosts relegated their manipulatory duties to a flabby butler at a sideboard. Robert Bartlam of Alcester, brandishing the carving knife, asked Samuel Parr what part of the loin of veal he would take. Lisped the rubicund doctor: "All the fat and all the kidney." They took wine with each other, of course, Mr. Vernon leading off in a bumper of port which had seen the inside of Snargate Church, when Jim Deedes led his merry men out from Hythe at midnight.

"A happy new year, my friends," said the host, "to all of you."

"A happy new year," whispered Harry Harcourt to Miss Nepean. "Ah, and it *shall* be happy, in spite of all obstacles."

Captain Vaux had marked the growing familiarity between these two with the keenest distrust and jealousy. When all were engaged at the table, I was at leisure to observe the frequent twitching of the eyebrows, and a sinister smile which boded no good to the happy pair.

Who was Captain Vaux? You may well ask. A roué who in early life, with the help of my Lord Mountford and Sir Thomas Bland, had run through two fortunes, until the pigeon, having shed his feathers, had endeavoured to replace them by plucking others.

Nothing, however, disturbed the serenity of the dinner. The conversation related chiefly to the death of Voltaire, and the eccentric behaviour of the too lively Princess Amelia in the Assembly Rooms who had thrown her cards in her partner's face, and swore like a trooper that he deserved the fate of Lady Elizabeth Luttrell.

The ladies withdrew at eight o'clock, and the gentlemen, following the custom of the day, remained for three hours drinking heavily; indeed, few of them could cross the short passage leading to the drawing-room without an inclination to tilt forward. Mr. Vernon, a three-bottle man, was, as he said, "as right as a trivet," and hastened to illustrate the fact by tumbling over Squattee, a diminutive negro, who was handing negus to the ladies.

All had left the dining-room to hear a pianoforte, an instrument resembling a shallow box on spindle legs, just introduced to Bath society by Miss Rebecca Bowen.

Presently Captain Vaux returned with Harry Harcourt, the latter excited with wine, the former cool and caustic, with that ominous twitch and sinister smile which meant mischief.

"Perhaps it is well to remind Mr. Harcourt," drawled the latter, "that Miss Nepean is engaged to me, and therefore not at liberty to accept his attentions."

"She hates you!" blurted out Harry Harcourt.

"Possibly; but at present that does not entitle the young lady to love you. So let me beg of you, my dear friend, to try those irresistible blandishments elsewhere; she really could not keep you if you cut me out."

Harcourt's face flushed, and his eyes glittered as stars.

"Better be poor than secure wealth at the expense of honour."

"To secure wealth needs a modicum of brains, fair sir, and the world does not credit you with that appendage ; although you seek to supply the deficiency by cunningly inveigling Miss Nepean into matrimony."

"That name is defiled by passing your lips."

"Truth obliges me to say, my young friend, that—that, in fact, you lie."

"What!"—passionately—"You tell me that I *lie*?"

Harry rushed downstairs into the hall, and brought from his great coat a case of loaded pistols. Selecting one, he pushed the other across to Vaux, exclaiming :

"Now—I dare you to say that I lie."

Vaux leisurely took up the pistol, and sarcastically observed :

"Perhaps an apology is needed ; you cannot help it. The force of habit is so strong, that—"

In another moment the snap of the trigger was heard. Vaux had just time to knock Harcourt's pistol aside with his own when a bullet whirred past his head, and struck me high up, making the ugly crow's foot which you see. Of course, the pistol-shot caused the other guests to rush in, when Vaux merely remarked to the host : "Your wine, Mr. Vernon, is rather stronger than the head of our young friend here, who is making a target of your mirror ; perhaps he had better be put to bed."

* * * * *

After this startling incident, I was surprised to find Vaux and Harcourt apparently on the most friendly terms. Perhaps Vaux, whom I always suspected of cowardice, found pluck where he least expected ; or remembered that Harcourt had a maiden aunt, Miss Baldwin, in Queen's Square, who was old as well as rich.

Frances Nepean was more circumspect in her behaviour, but no one could doubt her partiality for Harcourt.

At a time when in London the sum of £5000 was staked on one card at faro, and £270,000 changed hands in a single night, the vices of the Metropolis were subserviently copied in the provinces, and the passion for high play extended to Bath. Mr. Boission assured us, my dear, that at the York House Hotel the stakes were sometimes £50 on the game, and £1000 on the rubber at whist ; and Lord Cholmondeley on one occasion thoroughly cleared out a resident in the North Parade, who was not worth half-a-crown to pay for his sedan home.

I allude to this in order to state that Mr. Vernon was a very moderate player, who always marked the game with four guineas stamped with a horse-shoe for luck ; and thereby hangs a tale.

Business frequently called him to London, whither he went in his

cumbrous coach, containing many creature comforts, and a secret drawer in which were several pistols carefully stowed away.

Early one March, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon thus journeyed to town. I remember the date because the latter packed some complimentary mourning for the theatre, it being Lent; and Miss Nepean remained to keep house.

One Friday evening, shortly afterwards, the family were expected home.

Captain Vaux, having seen the huge coach, duly furnished, leave Hereford Street, preceded it on horseback, calling at the Royal Crescent to say that Mr. Vernon would arrive in three hours, and then he hurried away.

A long three hours, and Mr. Vernon so punctual. Kindly Mrs. Knipe, the housekeeper, replenished the fires, opened the hall door every time a carriage passed, and allayed for the thirteenth time the cook's anxiety that the supper would be "completely spoiled."

At midnight the well-known heavy rumble over the stones was heard, and Mr. and Mrs. Vernon alighted. Both were pale and agitated as Miss Nepean met them, and returned her cheerful greeting somewhat coldly, I thought.

"We have been waylaid and robbed," jerked out her uncle.

"Oh, where? who did it?" replied his niece, her voice trembling with emotion.

"By Bathford, close at home. As to who did it, there were half-a-dozen; but I fancy you know the chief rascal well enough, and perhaps his intention."

"I never *did* like that fancy of yours, Frances," exclaimed Mrs. Vernon bitterly.

"Oh, uncle, aunt, you amaze me; what can I possibly have to do with this outrage? But tell me," beseechingly, "is anybody hurt?"

"James has been shot in the leg," said her uncle, "but we should have damaged somebody's waistcoat if the pistols had not been tampered with on the road, I suspect. However, Jackson on the box spotted the varmint, and" (with an expletive) "he cannot escape, for I was close to him, and should know him among a thousand."

"Well," entreated Frances, "whom do you suspect?"

"*Suspect* is not the word," answered Mr. Vernon sharply; "the thing is a *dead* certainty for him when we lay him by the heels. This comes of harbouring a ne'er-do-well. Now I see all the artful scheming of your persistent admirer, Harcourt, intruding into this house, getting to know our habits, worming himself into your confidence, miss. I was warned of this long ago, but was fool enough to trust the ungrateful villain."

"I will not believe one word against him, in his absence," sobbed Frances, passionately. "Send for him; he was here scarcely two hours ago, anxiously inquiring where you changed horses, and when you were due, for he must see you at once."

"Very likely," said Mr. Vernon drily. "We will send for him; no doubt he will come."

Here Captain Vaux hastily entered, exclaiming: "By Jove! what an escape; heard all about it from Charlie Kelson the woodman; nasty scrape on your footman's leg, though. Do you suspect anybody?"

Mr. Vernon whispered to the captain.

"Never!" said the latter impulsively, "impossible! He and I were in the billiard-room at the *White Hart* at seven."

"This happened at *ten*," significantly remarked Mr. Vernon. "However, fetch this young gentleman, Vaux, and let him prove his innocence."

"Innocence! why, I am positive of it. I'll bet you a tenner to a tinder-box, Mr. Vernon, that he is innocent."

"Done, my hearty; now produce your evidence; run to his rooms, or just possibly he may not be at home."

Captain Vaux, plainly showing his chagrin at so unjust an accusation, hurried to the adjoining Rivers Street. After some delay he roused the maid-servant, who stood in the passage, holding a candle, and half asleep.

"Mr. Harcourt in?"

"Yee—es," dreamily responded Martha Hibbert.

"I know his room. I must see him at once; down in a minute; wait here," said Vaux, as he seized the candlestick and rushed upstairs.

But Harry Harcourt was not in his bedroom. In vain Vaux examined the bed, peeped into cupboards, probed heavy garments hanging against the walls; spent, in fact, so long a time in making quite sure of his friend's absence that the maid, now wide awake, had groped upstairs to the open bedroom door, and at length squeaked out:

"I ask yer pardin, Cap'en, but I remember now, as how Master Harcourt come in two hour ago, changed his things, and says, says he: 'Martha, don't sit up, I are going to a musk ball.'"

"Why could you not tell me this before," angrily growled Vaux, as he left the house.

"Not in!" shouted Mr. Vernon. "Did Dick Turpin wait in the bar-parlour and hold out his wrists for the barnacles? You are a clever man, Vaux; I shall deem you a fine sight cleverer if you can produce Harcourt."

"I assure you, sir, you wrong him fearfully," replied Vaux, reproachfully; "he has only gone to the masked ball at the new Guildhall. Now, it *would* be a good joke," added Vaux, brightening up, "to surprise him in his bedroom just when he returns in his fanciful toggery; it is nearly three o'clock now."

"I don't mind humouring you, but we had better take our night-caps."

"No, no ! he will certainly be back by four."

"Well, let us take a constable, at any rate."

"Mr. Vernon, such suspicions are neither worthy of you, nor flattering to my friendship. I have already bet you ten to—"

"All right ; that will lessen my loss of £400 and notes."

In vain Captain Vaux tried to divert suspicion to others ; Mr. Vernon remained doggedly obdurate.

Martha was again roused ; two shillings thrust into her hand, and told that when she let in Harcourt, no mention was to be made of their arrival.

No sooner had Mr. Vernon sat down in the bedroom than he espied a large blue cloth coat lined with silk, with bright steel buttons, hanging against the wall.

"I can swear to that coat," he exclaimed. "Jim's lanthorn was not put out before I saw it well when the wretch croaked, 'No hurt, mister, only money.'"

"Pooh, pooh ! my good sir ; one fellow's coat is just like another, especially by dip light ; you can't hang a man by the tails of his coat, you know. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"But what do you say to this," replied Mr. Vernon, examining the pockets, and producing his own large leather purse, quite empty ; two pistols, one of them still loaded ; a whistle, and several pieces of fine crape, with strings of narrow black ribbon.

Captain Vaux was thunderstruck. The pistols were the very same that Harcourt had impetuously thrown down on the dining-room table some weeks before ; so they might easily be accounted for ; but Mr. Vernon's empty purse, and the crape.

"I confess I am puzzled," sighed Vaux.

"What about the waistcoat," said Mr. Vernon triumphantly, taking it from the same peg. It was also made of blue cloth, and very open.

"Nothing particular about that," interposed Vaux eagerly. "I have seen hundreds like it."

"Don't be cock-sure, Mr. Advocate. When I was being handled by one of the fellows I must have clutched at his waistcoat, for I found a button on the carpet at my feet afterwards, and here it is ;" holding a large silver button between his fingers. One button was missing in the waistcoat, and this exactly corresponded with the others. And upon searching the pockets, ten guineas were found ; four of them stamped with a horseshoe : upon which Mr. Vernon exclaimed : "You may as well stand and deliver, Vaux ; the bet is as good as won."

"I will not, *cannot* admit it. These things are certainly very remarkable, but I feel somehow certain that when Harry comes in all will be explained."

"Ah ! when he *does* come in. Your friendship for Harcourt blinds you, Vaux, to this conclusive evidence of his guilt."

"Possibly! but wait. I hear a step on the stairs even now."

"If you please, Cap'en," whispered Martha at the door: "a link-boy has brought this:" handing a scrap of charred paper to Vaux. In his agitation he dropped it. It was in Harcourt's handwriting, and Mr. Vernon read aloud:

"*My dear Aunt* :—Don't be uneasy; all will come right; have fallen into a trap; France is spoken of—but the——"

The remainder was illegible. Vaux sat silent and sad; even Mr. Vernon pitied his distress, and was too kind-hearted to refer to the culprit; nor did he take any active measures to bring him to justice, in the belief that he had escaped beyond the seas.

He did not return, and Vaux with subdued and deferential mien continued his courtship, and endeavoured to secure Miss Nepean; yet the lady's repugnance to him unaccountably increased from that eventful night, and folks said that the engagement would never lead to anything. We missed the hearty good-natured Harry Harcourt, I can assure you; Miss Nepean most of all. How thin and pale she looked, as she stood in front of me, with the short auburn curls, then so fashionable, falling over her forehead. Yet she was active; often out for hours, and saw strange people, especially the maid Martha, in Rivers Street, and old Mrs. Titley, who told fortunes, and was great in astrology.

* * * * *

To the surprise of everybody in Bath, one evening, the following 25th of April, I believe, Captain Vaux was arrested for robbing James Gladell Vernon, Esq., and shooting, with intent to kill, his body-servant James Dolben, on the night of March 21st, a hundred years ago. Equally surprising was the circumstantial evidence which led to this arrest.

Frances Nepean suspected treachery from the very first; and with a woman's wit, sharpened by enmity, directly Captain Vaux had left with Mr. Vernon for Harcourt's lodgings, she had examined a thick overcoat which the Captain had carelessly thrown down. In it she found a curious key, with which (after donning this coat) she hurried to Edgar Buildings, and, as she expected, it admitted her into his lodgings. Two wax candles were burning low, and she saw on the couch, evidently hastily thrown off, a blue cloth coat and waistcoat, the exact counterpart of what Harcourt had worn some hours before. In the lappets of the coat were a false whisker, a tinder-box, a map of roads, and part of a letter in a feminine hand, demanding payment for a debt.

Her suspicion was increased by the repeated declaration of James Dolben, the footman, that: "Master Harcourt, he never fired at me, I'll take my Davy on it." James also added, showing her a bunch of black hair matted with mud: "I closed with the chap afore he shot me, and, grabbing his high collar, this came off in my hand." Frances begged it.

I have said that Harcourt and Vaux were alike in height and

figure, but the latter had no whiskers. What could be easier, thought Frances, than for Vaux, with the aid of false whiskers, to personate Harry in dress, manner, and even voice, which no doubt he did.

One link in the chain of evidence was wanting. Where was Harcourt! His sudden disappearance and that strange note seemed so confirmatory of his guilt that Mr. Vernon refused to give him the benefit of a doubt.

Fortunately one evening when Miss Nepean's sedan returned from a party at Mr. Bamston's, a link boy-called out to her, "I was never paid for bringing that ere paper here three week ago, and my mate said I should be sartin to have summut."

"Who sent you, my lad?" asked Frances, pale with excitement.

"A chap as was ostler at the *Cross Keys*, top of Entry Hill."

"Is he there now?"

"I dunno."

Miss Nepean gave him two shillings, and the next morning she walked two miles to the *Cross Keys*, a spacious old inn, standing at the junction of four cross roads on a bleak lonely moor, where it was hazardous to walk at nightfall, as certain uncouth fire-arms hung in the bar parlour testified.

The ostler, a stunted youth, about eighteen, was still there. He thought he remembered summut about that ere note; he was quite sure he did when Miss Nepean gave him half-a-crown. After clipping it with his teeth he began :

"There was some sojers as called us up at midnight in the kitchen, and they was a-gammoning a slim man as was dressed—my eye! how he was dressed, in silk stockings and ribbons, and buckles, and a gold-laced coat like a morris-dancer!—and, persuading him to drink; 'but,' says he, 'you're mistaken; I'm a genlmn.'

"'I knows you are,' says the sergeant. 'You are the genlmn I wants as run away from His Majesty's ship *Goliath*, as these ere papers show, as was given to me by a real captain in Bath; but cheer up, we bain't agoin' to round on yer: King George has sent me to persuade a few smart fellows of your kidney to enter his service, we're promotion is as sartin as the pay.'

"'My ——,' cried the genlmn, 'I see it all—the press-gang—and that vile serpent has set 'em on!'

"He give me a wink when t'others were not a-looking; and they all fell a-smoking. Then I seed him scrawl on a bit of paper below the table, which he twisted and lighted his pipe with; then he threw it in the fender and looked at me.

"They was uncommonly fond of him, to be sure, specially when a-going upstairs, but I managed to hand him a candle, and he slipt a shilling up my sleeve. When the folks was all a-bed I got hold of the paper; it was half cinder, but the direction was plain, and I see you 'a got it mum."

Fortunately the sergeant had left directions for an expected letter

to be forwarded to Plymouth, and it was here that after much delay and inquiry Harry Harcourt was discovered, with other pressed men, in the *Admiral Benbow* warship, waiting further orders from the Government ; and through the exertions of Governor Pownall, he was eventually set free. Miss Nepean and her *confidante* Mrs. Titley, kept their own counsel ; and not a word did Vaux know of the discovery until he found himself face to face with Harcourt in this very room.

I shall never forget the scene. While two stout constables waited below, there stood the much injured Harcourt, kept in check by Miss Nepean, or I verily believe he would have murdered the now craven and suppliant Vaux, who was entreating Mr. Vernon's forgiveness, or, at least, clemency. "Consider my family, dearest sir." Mr. Vernon rather considered his own family and credit, he having patronised Vaux in every way ; and what would Bath society say ? This reflection caused him at length to relent. But one of the stringent conditions attached was that Vaux should pay straight down the £400 which he had stolen, and give £100 to James Dolben (Harry Harcourt had his compensation later on), and that he should confess everything which he did. He explained how he had a suit made of the exact pattern of Harcourt's, and dropping one of the waistcoat buttons in the carriage, had afterwards substituted his own waistcoat in Harry's bedroom, and craftily placing in the pocket the marked guineas, had also transferred the pistols, purse, and other incriminating articles to the pockets of the coat. How he had lured four harmless lads to intimidate the occupants of the carriage ; and at his instigation these lads, as well as Harcourt, were seized the same night by the press-gang in Bath, &c.

Vaux was allowed to escape, and was never again heard of in Bath.

* * * * *

Were they supremely happy ever afterwards, Frances and Harry ? Of course they were, my dear ; or why should that marble tablet in the Abbey set forth a wealth of affection not often given to mortals ?



THE MAN WITH THE IVORY PASS.

BY T. W. SPEIGHT, AUTHOR OF "THE GREY MONK," ETC.



I.

IN the year to which this narrative refers there was no more popular passenger guard on the Great South-Northern Railway than David Finch. Not only was he liked by his fellow-guards, he had also the good fortune to stand high in the esteem of the chief officers of his department, while the number of tips of which he was the recipient might be taken as a fair indication of his popularity with the travelling public.

David's duties lay chiefly in connection with one or other of the mail or express trains, one of them, which was worked by him every third week, being known as "the 5.15 P.M. fast." By the train in

question Mr. Greening, the cashier at head-quarters, was in the habit once a month of forwarding to the cashier at Lowcastle a sum of money wherewith to pay the salaries of the staff, not merely at Lowcastle itself, but at a number of minor stations further down the line. The amount thus forwarded averaged little short of a thousand pounds, and, with the exception of twenty pounds' worth of silver, consisted wholly of sovereigns and half-sovereigns. It was locked up in a strong box clamped with iron, of which Mr. Greening held one key and the Lowcastle cashier another.

On a certain autumn afternoon as daylight was fading into dusk and the terminus lamps were being lighted, two porters brought the box containing the monthly salaries out of Mr. Greening's office and deposited it in David Finch's van, which was in the rear of the 5.15 train, and in accordance with their instructions, did not lose sight of the van till the train was fairly under way. Besides the box the van contained a considerable quantity of passengers' luggage, together with quite a heap of official correspondence and documents of various kinds, which it was a part of David's duty to sort in readiness for

distribution at the different stations down the line to which they were addressed.

Bunningfield, twelve miles away and the first stopping-place, was reached in due course. Here David quitted his van as usual in order to attend to his passengers, in conjunction with his fellow-guard, whose van was next the engine. As he stepped on to the platform he did not neglect to shut his van door behind him.

For the ensuing three minutes all was hurry and apparent confusion, then the watchful driver got his signal, and a couple of seconds later the wheels of the engine began to revolve. David, who had been having a last word with the station-master, swung himself with the surety which comes of long practice on to the footboard of his van as it was passing him, and on opening the door, was on the point of stepping inside when he was startled as he had rarely been startled before by finding two men there, both of whom were utter strangers to him. He paused, with one foot on the step and the door in his hand, and then involuntarily his glance went past the men to the cash-box in the corner, which, however, was there, to all appearance just as he had left it.

Then he said sternly: "Gentlemen, you ought to know that you have no business here—in fact, nobody has any right here but myself. I must stop the train and you must at once change into an ordinary compartment." As he spoke he put up an arm and laid his hand on the cord of communication between his van and the engine. By this time it was quite dark outside, and the only light was that shed by the lamp in the roof of the van.

"Stop, stop, my good man," said the elder of the two strangers, as he laid a restraining hand on David's arm. "Not quite so fast, if you please. I suppose you don't know who I am? I thought not. Well, I am Mr. Medwin, the recently elected director, and here is my authority for travelling by any train and in any vehicle which may suit my convenience."

As he spoke he extracted from his waistcoat pocket an ivory disc about the size of a two-shilling piece, stamped on one side with the bearer's name, and on the other with that of the particular railway for which it was available, the whole forming a special kind of pass, common to most of the leading lines, but the use of which is restricted to the directors and chief officials of the service.

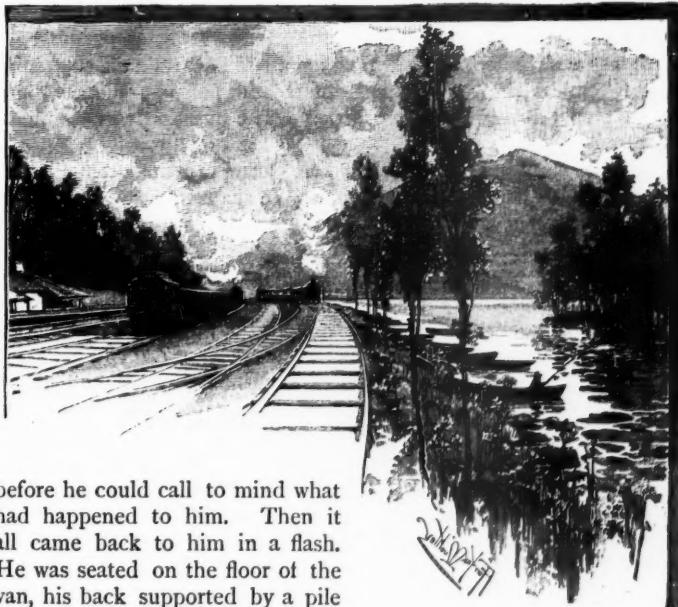
"My purpose this evening," resumed Mr. Medwin, "is to travel in your van as far as Lowcastle. I am projecting certain reforms in various departments, and am desirous of obtaining as much experience and of picking up as much information at first hand as I possibly can, so that I shall probably have a few questions to put to you by-and-by. This gentleman is my amanuensis."

Evidently there was nothing left for David to say or do. The situation was not of his choosing; he could only submit and make the best of it.

Both the strangers were gentlemanly-looking, well-dressed men, and there was nothing about them calculated to create the slightest suspicion in David's mind that they were other than what Mr. Medwin had asserted them to be. The younger of the two now proceeded to light a cigarette, while Mr. Medwin, standing under the lamp with his legs a little way apart, employed himself in making entries in his note-book, as well as the jolting of the train would allow of his doing. David turned his back on them, and began the sorting of his papers.

A crashing blow on the head, darkness and insensibility.

A couple of minutes passed after David recovered consciousness



before he could call to mind what had happened to him. Then it all came back to him in a flash. He was seated on the floor of the van, his back supported by a pile of luggage, and still feeling strangely sick and dizzy. A little distance away were the two men—the sham director and his so-called amanuensis—who were bending over the cash-box and trying to force it open by means of a small "jemmy" which the younger of the two had produced from the black leather-bag he had brought with him into the van.

Everything was clear to David now. The whole affair was nothing less than a skilfully-planned and daringly-executed scheme of robbery, and although the thieves had not yet succeeded in getting away with their booty, there seemed to be nothing to hinder them from doing so when the proper moment should arrive. There was a long down-grade tunnel into Lowcastle station through which the trains always

ran at a greatly reduced speed, a fact of which the rogues would doubtless take advantage to risk a leap from the van and so get clear away with their spoil. It made his blood boil to realise how helpless he was, for during the time he had been unconscious they had bound his wrists and ankles with some pieces of stout cord which it was not unlikely they had brought with them for that purpose.

Presently the efforts of the men proved successful. The lid of the box was prised open and the contents, in little bags of fifty sovereigns each, lay exposed to their greedy gaze. But before touching the money they turned and confronted their prisoner.

"Look here, my friend," said the self-styled director, "no harm shall happen to you as long as you keep quiet and take matters as you find them. Neither can your employers in fairness hold you responsible for—"

He was interrupted by the other man. "The train is slackening speed!" he exclaimed. "What's the meaning of it? We are timed not to stop till we reach Lowcastle." The question was pointedly addressed to Finch.

"We are going up Shanbrook Down," answered the latter, "which is always a heavy pull for the engine. We shall be at the summit in five or six minutes, after which we shall go ahead again at full speed."

The men looked at each other and seemed satisfied. Then the first one spoke again. "As I was saying, the company can't in common fairness hold you responsible for this night's work. Any other guard in your place would have acted as you did. Remember, we are desperate men running a desperate risk, so do you take my advice and make the best of circumstances as they are; otherwise, I've a little article here which I shall not hesitate to use should you put me under the painful necessity of doing so."

As he spoke he drew from his hip-pocket a small revolver, and for a couple of seconds David felt its cold barrel pressed against his forehead. Then, with a meaning nod, the fellow turned away and together the two began to transfer the bags of sovereigns from the box to the black bag.

II.

Now, just on the brow of the Shanbrook incline there was a signal-box, and David felt nearly sure that from the top of the short flight of steps which gave access to it a certain face would be peering into the darkness with the sole object of obtaining a momentary glimpse of him as the train forged past at half speed—which face was to him the dearest in the world.

The fact was that David's sweetheart, Lucy Ford, who was in a situation at Lowcastle, happened just then to be at home for her holidays. Lucy's parents lived in the village of Shanbrook, and her

brother Ned was one of the two men who, turn and turn about, had charge of the incline signal-box. Lucy, knowing that this was David's week for working the "5.15 fast," made a point of carrying her brother's supper to him, and of so timing matters as to reach the box about five minutes before the train in question was due, after which she would station herself on the little platform outside in readiness. Then would David's head, and half his body to boot, be protruded from the van-window, and a wave of the hand and a cheery "good-night" would be exchanged between the lovers as the train sped on its way. Would Lucy be on the look-out for him to-night? was the anxious query David now put to himself.

Lucy was on the look-out. But scarcely had the train passed before she burst into the signal-box, turning on her brother a frightened face from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"Oh! Ned, Ned," she cried, "something has happened to Dave—I'm sure there has! He wasn't looking out for me as usual, so as the van passed I could see right into it, and there he was, sitting on the floor, with a patch of blood on the right side of his head, his eyes straining as if to catch sight of me, and his face as white as a sheet. And there were two men at the back of the van, bending over something, whose faces I couldn't see. There's been foul play, I'm sure there has," added the girl with a sudden break in her voice. "Ned, Ned, what's to be done?"

Ned stared at his sister like one who feared she had taken leave of her senses. He was a well-meaning but somewhat stolid and slow-witted young fellow. He had been appointed to his present position only a few weeks before and was still somewhat puffed up by a sense of his own importance. Although startled and vaguely alarmed by Lucy's statement, couched as it was in such positive terms, he did not in the least doubt that her eyes had played her false, and so he proceeded to give her plainly to understand.

But the bare possibility of such a thing was indignantly scouted by Lucy. The scene inside the van had impressed itself on her brain with the vividness of an instantaneous photograph. All she could do was to urge her brother to at once telegraph a warning message to Claypool, the next station, whence it would be passed on to Lowcastle. But this Ned positively refused to do. He was naturally of a timorous disposition, and was by no means minded to take upon himself so great a responsibility on what seemed to him such very insufficient grounds. As likely as not, as he said a little sulkily, his doing so might result in his dismissal from the service. The express goods was due, he had his signals to attend to and she mustn't bother him any longer. Lucy made one last appeal to him, but to no purpose. He bade her a curt good-night and turned his back on her. The girl wrung her hands in despair as she went slowly down the steps that led from the box.

Three minutes later the express goods panted slowly up and then

came to a stand about a score yards from the box. Ned Ford had had not yet received the notification from Claypool that the 5.15 fast had passed that station, and till he should receive it the goods train could not proceed on its way.

Lucy, scarcely knowing what she was about, such was the conflict of emotions at work within her, had mechanically taken the footway which led from the signal-box by the side of the hedge that skirted the line in the direction of Shanbrook village, but when the goods-train came to a stand she too, for no conscious reason, did the same.

At the point where she was standing she faced the guard's van in the rear of the train. She knew that in the course of a minute or two, it might be in the course of a few seconds, her brother would receive the signal "line clear," and the goods-train would then be allowed to go on its way. Then all at once, where but a moment before there had been a great darkness, she saw her way clear before her. A low cry broke from her lips. Hastily parting the prickly branches of the hedge, she contrived to squeeze her way through, and then ran swiftly down the embankment and so round the rear of the train to the opposite side.

Scarcely had she achieved this before the engine gave vent to a shrill whistle as a notice to the guard to take off the brake. The wished-for signal had been given them ; they were at liberty to proceed on their journey. Lucy had barely time to spring on to the footboard of the van and grasp with both hands the bar which ran along its side before there came a preliminary jerk at the leading truck which was repeated from one to another along the length of the train, till, last of all, it reached the van and all but shook poor Lucy off her perch. Then the train began to gather way, and a few seconds later the signal-box was left behind, the guard, all unconscious of Lucy's presence on the other side, calling out from his van a gruff "good-night" to Ned Ford as he passed.

The train, now it had crossed the brow of the down, gathered momentum second by second, and was soon speeding through the darkness at the rate of forty miles an hour. Lucy, half kneeling, half crouching on the footboard, had wound her left arm tightly round the bar, while the fingers of her right hand clung to it with grim tenacity. It was a frightfully insecure position for one who was certainly not intended by nature to be the heroine of any such adventure. But what cannot love accomplish ! Presently her sailor-hat blew off and was lost for ever. Then the wind caught her hair in its unseen fingers, and tearing it from its fastenings, sent it streaming out in a wild tangle behind her. But Lucy only set her little white teeth harder than before, seeing in her mind's eye nothing save her lover's ghastly face and straining eyes and the splash of blood just above his right temple.

The distance from Shanbrook signal-box to Claypool station is four miles and a half. The express goods was not booked to stop at

the latter place, and unless it should be blocked by signal owing to its following so close on the heels of the passenger-train, Lucy would be compelled to go on with it to West Overton, six miles further. Fortunately for her the Claypool signals were set against it as it rounded the last curve before steaming through the station, causing the driver to bring his train up with a jolt and a jerk as though enraged at his enforced detention. With a heart-breathed thanksgiving Lucy slipped off her perch, but not till two or three minutes had gone by could her cramped limbs be persuaded into doing her bidding. A little later she was telling her story to Mr. Twyford, the Claypool station-master, a prompt and energetic official, who was inclined to take a very different view of the affair from that taken by Mr. Ned Ford.

"Look out for rear van of 5.15 fast. Thieves supposed to be at work." Such was the message telegraphed to Lowcastle by Mr. Twyford within five minutes of his setting eyes on Lucy Ford.

Meanwhile, however, matters inside the van had taken an unexpected turn.

III.

HAVING transferred the whole of the cash from the box to their bag, our two rogues, finding themselves with some spare time on their hands, turned their attention to the passengers' luggage, among which was a Saratoga trunk bearing the superscription of "Lady Silverdale." Surely among the belongings of so notable a personage there ought to be some little knick-knacks worth appropriating! Accordingly the "sweet persuasion" of the jemmy was presently brought to bear on her ladyship's trunk.

It was while they were thus engaged that David Finch became aware of the presence of some hard substance interposed between his right leg and the floor of the van. Then he called to mind that at the moment he was struck down he was in the act of cutting the string he had just tied round a packet of documents to be left by him at Lowcastle Station. The substance in question, he was now convinced, must be his pocket-knife which had dropped from his fingers when he was attacked. If only he could get possession of it! But how? He did not wait to answer the question, but there and then began to wriggle the lower part of his body with an almost imperceptible movement, and at the same time to dilate and contract the muscles of his leg. Two minutes later the haft of the knife had worked itself into view.

While thus employed, David, as a matter of course, kept a wary eye on the thieves, but so convinced were they of his helplessness, and so intent were they on what they were about, that several minutes passed without their bestowing as much as a glance on him.

Although David was tightly bound at the wrists and ankles, in other respects he was free. Watching his opportunity, he succeeded, by extending his arms and bending forward the upper part of his body, in gaining possession of the knife. "But now that I've got it, what better off am I?" he asked himself a moment later. He was powerless to use it. His wrists were so tied that it was out of the question he could himself cut the cord that bound them; and although, had he been alone, he might perhaps have contrived to sever the cord that held his ankles, placed as he was it would have been impossible to do so without attracting attention to what he was about. For a few moments his heart felt as heavy as lead—heavier than before his discovery of the knife. His chin drooped forward on his breast and hope died within him.

Then, all in a moment, a flash of inspiration—for nothing less did it seem—came to him. Bending forward as before, with the knife grasped by the fingers of his right hand, he succeeded in wedging the haft of it into the interstice formed by the hollows of his ankles, the cord with which his ankles were bound holding them firmly together. The knife, as already stated, was open, and the protruding blade was nearly as sharp as a razor. A quarter of a minute sufficed to sever the ligature that held David's wrists, after which it was the work of only a few more seconds to cut the cord which confined his lower limbs. Once more he was a free man.

Not for his life, however, durst he just then have made any further movement, not till he should have more fully recovered the use of his hands and feet, numbed and deadened by the tightness of his bonds. Once the younger of the two men glanced round, but seeing no change in David's position, and failing to notice that his cords were cut, he turned again to what he was engaged upon and concerned himself no further about his prisoner. By this time the lid of Lady Silverdale's trunk had been forced and inside it had been found an article which bore a suspicious resemblance to a jewel case. The men, as they bent over it, were agog with expectation. The revolver with which the elder man had threatened David had been placed by him on another trunk, ready to his hand in case of need.

The moment for action had come. Silent as a shadow, David rose to his feet. It was the work of a second to grip each of the men firmly by the neck, send them crashing head foremost into the Saratoga trunk and jam the lid down on them. When, startled nearly out of their wits, they contrived to extricate themselves, it was to find themselves confronted by a stern-eyed man, grasping a revolver which was pointed full at them.

"Come one step nearer, and the first who does so is a dead man!" exclaimed David. "Back you go into that corner, and stir from there at your peril."

With ashen faces and trembling limbs, they did as they were ordered. There was that in Finch's bearing which convinced them

he was not to be trifled with, and that if they wished to keep a whole skin they had better do as they were told. Besides which, they were cravens at heart, as such scoundrels nearly always are.

IV.

"WELL, of all things!" exclaimed Mr. Pilbeach, the Lowcastle station-master, as he read the message which had been telegraphed from Claypool. "That's the train the salaries come by. Our best plan will be to take time by the forelock and go and meet it."

Before ten minutes had gone by the yard shunting engine was carrying Mr. Pilbeach and some half-dozen of his staff through the tunnel. At the further end they alighted and the engine was sent back. Before leaving the station orders had been given the signalman to block the down line, by which means the 5.15 would be pulled up just before entering the tunnel. Then Mr. Pilbeach so disposed his men that they would be able to take possession of the rear van almost before the train should have come to a stand.

Great, however, was the surprise of that official when, on boarding the van, which he was the first to do, he found Dave Finch keeping guard with a revolver over two cowering wretches, whose bravado, now that the tables had been so completely turned on them, had given place to the most abject fear. A pair of handcuffs for each of them was quickly forthcoming.

The elder of the two rascals proved to be a notorious *chevalier d'industrie* who had plied his calling, in one or other of its branches, for a number of years, and was well acquainted with the interior of more than one of her Majesty's prisons. The ivory pass put by him to such an ingenious, if nefarious, use proved to be a genuine one. About a week previously Mr. Medwin's bedroom in a certain London hotel had been surreptitiously entered in the middle of the night, and the ivory pass had been one of the articles stolen on that occasion.

The marriage of David Finch and Lucy Ford took place some three months after the events herein narrated. The grant of fifty guineas awarded Lucy by the Directors of the Company enabled the young couple to set up housekeeping in comfortable style.



"ACCORDING TO HIS EXCELLENT GREATNESS."

[“He appointed singers unto the Lord . . . that should praise the beauty of holiness.”—2 Chron. xx. 21.]

Like to a strain of music strong and sweet,
There calls a voice along life's busy ways—
“Oh ! ye who walk with heavy-laden feet
And low-bent heads throughout your toilsome days,
Where is your song of praise ?

“Ye He created, ye He did redeem,
Gave to you every precious gift ye had,
Gave you His sun with its resplendent beam,
And fruitful seasons when your hearts were sad,
And yet ye are not glad !

“Did He take anything away from thee,
One tender lamb of all your well-filled fold,
But that it might more safely guarded be,
When days were short and winter nights a-cold,
'Mid blessedness untold ?

“Hath He not smiled on joy, made young hearts light,
Yea, all this gracious world to give you zest ?
Doth He not promise victory after fight,
And, when ye weary even of earth's best,
That He will give you rest ?

“Lo ! He created love your lot to cheer,
Gave wife and child and kin and faithful friend ;
Nay, furthermore, than closest ties more dear,
He did Himself for you most freely spend
Unto the bitter end.

“He made a living way for you through death,
A swift short passage to His Kingdom fair,
And touched for ever with Divinest breath
Your very sorrows, for in all your care
He did Himself have share.

“Oh ! thankless hearts, and faith grown cold and dim,
The earth herself hath made a better choice ;
With angels and archangels, seraphim,
And all the saints of heaven she doth rejoice—
Have ye alone no voice ?

“The king chose singers in the days of yore,
The praise of God's great glory to confess ;
Ye from the King of kings commission bore,
And will ye do for Him so much the less
To laud His holiness ?

“Oh ! singers, be ye tuneful, be ye strong,
Lift up your voice for Him Who loved you so ;
One day ye too shall sing the glad new song—
On high the perfect harmony doth flow,
The parts are learnt below.”

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

